

剑桥政治思想史原著系列（影印本）

CAMBRIDGE TEXTS IN THE HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT

# 关于佛罗伦萨政府 的 对 话

*Dialogue on  
the Government  
of Florence*

Guicciardini

奎恰迪尼

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Edited by

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ALISON

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BROWN

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中国政法大学出版社

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*Series editors*

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This is the first translation into English of Guicciardini's *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*. Written in the early 1520s by the author of the famous *History of Italy*, as well as a *History of Florence* and political *Maxims and Reflections*, this dialogue presents what is arguably the most searching and comprehensive analysis of the politics of his times. It takes the form of a debate about the rival merits of the Medici regime from 1434 to 1494 and the popular regime that succeeded it, offering a critical analysis of Medici government and of republican ideology, especially the concepts of liberty and equality adopted by the popular regime. Although Guicciardini's own preferred model of government is based on control by an aristocratic elite, he rejects classical republican arguments in the name of the new political realism, like his contemporary and friend Machiavelli. Acknowledging the important role of patronage and graft in contemporary politics and the illegitimacy of nearly all forms of political power, Guicciardini provides, in this *Dialogue*, one of the clearest expositions of the term 'reason of state', which he was one of the first to employ and which he uses to justify the priority of state interest over private morality and religion.

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奎恰迪尼  
GUICCIARDINI

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GUICCIARDINI  
*Dialogue on the Government of Florence*

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# 剑桥政治思想史原著系列

## 丛书编辑

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在政治理论领域，“剑桥政治思想史原著系列”作为主要的学生教科丛书，如今已牢固确立了其地位。本丛书旨在使学生能够获得从古希腊到 20 世纪初期西方政治思想史方面所有最为重要的原著。它囊括了所有著名的经典原著，但与此同时，它又扩展了传统的评价尺度，以便能够纳入范围广泛、不那么出名的作品。而在此之前，这些作品中有许多从未有过现代英文版本可资利用。只要可能，所选原著都会以完整而不删节的形式出版，其中的译作则是专门为本丛书的目的而安排。每一本书都有一个评论性的导言，加上历史年表、生平梗概、进一步阅读指南，以及必要的词汇表和原文注解。本丛书的最终目的是，为西方政治思想的整个发展脉络提供一个清晰的轮廓。

本丛书已出版著作的书目，请查阅书末。

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## Introduction

Francesco Guicciardini was born on 6 March 1483 into one of the leading merchant families of Florence. His names reflect the influence of family tradition as well as the tradition of lay piety in Florence, since he was named Francesco after a great-grandfather Francesco de' Nerli, and Tommaso after the saint on whose feast-day he was born, Thomas Aquinas. So his 'special advocates and patrons', as he calls them, Francis and Thomas, associated him with the leading Mendicant Orders in Florence (*Ricordanze*, p. 53; for details of this and other works see Bibliographical note, p. xxxii). The choice of Marsilio Ficino, 'the leading Platonic philosopher in the world at the time' (*ibid.*), was less traditional, however. Francesco's father Piero had been a pupil of Ficino's and was the first member of his family to have a humanist education. Piero ensured that his son, too, studied the humanities as a boy, learning a little Greek as well as Latin, which would have prepared him for an ecclesiastical career. However, despite the possibility of following in the lucrative footsteps of his uncle, Bishop of Cortona, Francesco was discouraged from doing so by his father, who preferred to sacrifice the immediate profit this career would have offered his son for the sake of his conscience (*Ricordanze*, p. 56). Instead he studied law, initially in Florence, then in Ferrara and Padua, before returning to Florence. There he received a doctorate in civil law in 1505 (rather than the more prestigious doctorate 'of both kinds', canon as well as civil law, which would have cost another twelve-and-a-half ducats, his education having in all cost his father more than 500 gold ducats, *Ricordanze*, pp. 56-7). He started work at once as a teacher in the university and as an

advocate, acting for communes, private clients and for institutions like the Hospital of Santa Maria Nuova in Florence.

Francesco's writing career began in 1508, the year of his marriage to Maria, daughter of Alamanno Salviati. Thanks to his patrician status and his wealth, his family relationships and his 'infinite number of friends', Alamanno was, in Francesco's eyes, 'incomparably the first man in the city' when he died in 1510 (*Ricordanze*, pp. 58, 66-7). However, he was unpopular with Francesco's own father for political as well as financial reasons: in addition to enjoying too grandiose a life-style for the dowry he offered, Alamanno was an enemy of the head of the government, Piero Soderini. But having deferred to his father's scruples once in renouncing an ecclesiastical career, Francesco was determined not to forgo this opportunity of advancing his career by marrying into the powerful Salviati family. His eventual marriage to Maria in May 1508, after an eighteen-month secret betrothal (unwillingly accepted by his father), is an early sign of Francesco's ambition. The secrecy and deception that it involved also indicate the political dangers and rivalries in Florence that would make his *Dialogue* both dangerous to write and difficult to interpret.

Following the stock-taking practice of newly-wed Florentines, Francesco marked his rite of passage with a series of writings: his autobiographical *Memoirs* or *Ricordanze*, began in April 1508 just before his marriage, his *Family Memoirs*, and shortly afterwards his *History of Florence*. To this triptych of writings about himself, his family and his city, he added in 1509 a ledger of business accounts, recording some 920 legal briefs and fees from a wide range of clients, public and private, over eleven years. This recently-edited ledger illustrates how closely Francesco's legal activities were related to politics during this period, and how much they must have contributed to his later political insights.

The year 1509 also marks Francesco's initiation into the life of politics, when he was summoned for the first time to a consultative meeting of citizens, or *pratica* (see Glossary). In 1511, aged only 28, he was elected Florentine ambassador to Spain, and it was there, at Logroño, that he wrote the *Discourse* which anticipates in many respects his reform scheme in Book II of the *Dialogue*. It offers a blueprint for the reform of the republican regime headed by Piero Soderini, completed (if we are to believe its date, '27 August 1512') just before the collapse of this regime at the hands of the Spanish at

the end of August, and several weeks before he would have heard about it. The same period of relative leisure also inspired the first of three versions of reflective *Ricordi* or *Maxims*, which he twice revised during similar periods of enforced leisure, in 1528 and 1530. Kept well-informed by his family of the new situation in Florence, and of 'who stood highest in Medici favour', he was allowed to return home in January 1514.

Far from being disadvantaged by the fall of the republican regime and restoration of the Medici, Francesco found himself on his return favoured by a series of offices, initially in Florence and later in the Papal States. He was happy to accede to Lorenzo di Piero de' Medici's wish that he, rather than his elder brother, should take his father's place as one of the Seventeen Reformers in 1514. The following year he was appointed a member of the Eight of Ward and then a member of the Signoria, and in December that year he was appointed a consistorial advocate by the Medici pope Leo X. These interim years of office in Florence produced two more political writings on Florentine government, *On the Government of Florence after the Medici Restoration in 1512* and *On How the Medici Family Should Secure Power for Themselves*. Both realistically accept that, since self-preservation is the objective of government, the Medici will have to protect themselves against popular opposition by building up a group of partisans who will have more to lose than gain by a change of regime: 'so that utility, indeed necessity, and not just love' will ensure their support (*Del governo*, p. 266). The second piece, written in 1516, shows early traces of the influence of Machiavelli's *Prince* – as Gennaro Sasso has pointed out<sup>1</sup> – in its 'digression' about the problem of ruling new states and reference to Cesare Borgia and Francesco Sforza. Accepting that the Medici are now 'bosses' (*padroni*) of Florence, it suggests that they could avoid the problems experienced by Lorenzo il Magnifico by feeding their friends in Rome, not Florence, 'now that they have the pontificate in their hands' (*Del modo*, pp. 273, 279): prescient advice in view of the reward he himself received from them later that year.

Francesco's first papal appointment marked another turning-point in his life, as he may himself have recognised at the time. For this

<sup>1</sup> G. Sasso, 'Machiavelli and Guicciardini', in *Per Francesco Guicciardini. Quattro studi*, Rome, 1984, pp. 94–5.



was the moment when he apparently had his first horoscope written, anticipating by some months his appointment as papal Governor of Modena in the summer of 1516, when it said he began to enjoy 'wealth and office in a very alarming and difficult position'. The following year he was appointed Governor of Reggio as well as Modena, in 1521 papal Commissary General in the war against the French, in 1524 President of the Romagna under the new Medici pope Clement VII (the year in which he possibly had a second horoscope prepared), and in 1526 papal Lieutenant General of the War of the League of Cognac.

It was during this period of his life, more precisely between August–November 1521 and, at the earliest, April 1524, that Francesco wrote the *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*. It is dated in its second preface (B; see p. xxv below), which states that it was begun 'at the time of Leo, when I found myself in the position of his Commissary General in the imperial and papal army in the war against the French', and was finished 'now that I have been appointed by Clement Governor of all the cities in the Romagna, which are extremely disturbed and full of infinite difficulties because of the uprisings that followed Leo's death'. So it belongs to the period when Florentines were optimistic about a return to a more republican government. After the death in May 1519 of Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, Florence's Captain General and the last legitimate descendant (with Leo X) of Lorenzo the Magnificent, the Florentines had been consulted by the well-liked cardinal Giulio de' Medici about how their city should be governed. Since Giulio was popular in Florence and known to be fond of the city, they were evidently confident that he would treat their suggestions seriously and introduce constitutional reform. So it seems likely, as Giovanni Silvano has suggested,<sup>2</sup> that – far from being written after the moment for a republican restoration had 'gone forever', in Pocock's words – Guicciardini's *Dialogue* shared the same very practical purpose as Machiavelli's *Discourse on the Government of Florence after the Death of Lorenzo de' Medici* and other blueprints proposed at this time.

<sup>2</sup> 'Gli uomini da bene di F.G: coscienza aristocratica e repubblica a Firenze nel primo '500', *Archivio storico italiano* 148 (1990), pp. 856–60; J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton, 1975, p. 221.

The situation was transformed in a paradoxical way by two events. The first was the abortive plot to kill Giulio de' Medici in 1522, which alienated Giulio and, instead of reducing Medici power in Florence, increased it. The second was Giulio's elevation to the papacy as Clement VII in November 1523. By initially strengthening the Medici's position in Florence, these events must have increased the fear Guicciardini had already expressed (in prefaces A and B, pp. 2, 5, nn. 4 and 19) of alienating his patrons through his republicanism. Yet, at the same time, the growing and openly-discussed possibility of revolution in Florence, now governed by the unpopular cardinal Silvio Passerini and the young Medici bastard Ippolito, raised a worse spectre for Guicciardini of being victimised by the republican regime as a Medicean – and possibly suffering the same fate as Bernardo del Nero, his *alter ego*, who was executed for his Medici sympathies. So whereas the first preface (A) expressed the hope of publishing the *Dialogue*, 'before I grow old', despite the danger of doing so with Florence 'under the shadow of the Medici government' (in A and B), its final preface (C) disclaims any political relevance or intention to publish (p. 4 and nn. 4, 14). The final preface also adds a flattering reference to Piero Soderini's republican government. Instead of suggesting that he might be thought ungrateful to the Medici in writing the *Dialogue*, he now alludes to Xenophon and Aristotle in order to suggest his political detachment (since Xenophon's loyalty to Athens was evidently not compromised by his biography of Cyrus, nor Aristotle's loyalty to Alexander the Great by his *Politics* (p. 4)); and at the same time he removes names from the text to modify his earlier more trenchant comments on both regimes. Far from being detached, however, these cosmetic adjustments to the text and its convoluted preface suggest that the *Dialogue* was both relevant and potentially dangerous in the later 1520s.

In May 1527, a year after Guicciardini was appointed Lieutenant General of the papal army, Rome was sacked by imperial troops and the Medici regime in Florence fell. Losing his position, Guicciardini retired to his villa outside Florence, where he wrote two imaginary orations which accurately forecast what was to happen two years later, the *Accusatoria*, in which he accuses himself of crimes against the state before a session of the Court of Forty, and the *Defensoria*, in which he defends himself. Increasingly isolated as the republican government in Florence became more extreme, he began his second

history of Florence, the *Cose fiorentine*, as well as a third version of his *Maxims*. The Treaty of Barcelona between Clement and Charles V in June 1529 obliged the Emperor to restore the Medici to Florence. Threatened with imprisonment and banishment by the republican government, Guicciardini fled from Florentine territory; despite acting as mediator between Florence and the Pope, however, he was accused of contumacy and banished as a rebel. His *Considerations on the 'Discourses' of Machiavelli* was written as he travelled as an exile to Rome, whence he returned as papal emissary to restore order in Florence after its final capitulation in August 1530. Rewarded with the Governorship of Bologna – but not the Romagna, as he had hoped – Guicciardini finally retired to Florence after the death of Clement VII in September 1534. Before then, however, he had been responsible for helping to establish Alessandro, the illegitimate last descendant of the elder Medici line, as Duke of Florence in 1532. In January that year he had repeated to the Pope the advice he had given Leo X in 1516: that the Medici should not establish a principate but strengthen their partisans in the city, among whom he now openly included himself (*Discourse* of 30 January 1532, p. 455). A *balìa* was created (as he had recommended) and in April 1532 it appointed him one of the Twelve Reformers who made Alessandro Duke of Florence. Later he became one of Alessandro's closest advisers and was principally responsible for defending him against the exiles' charges of tyranny in 1535–6, asserting not only that Alessandro's ducal title was legitimate, since it had been granted by the delegated authority of a Florentine *parlamento* with imperial consent, but that his behaviour was 'most holy and his government free and pious'.<sup>3</sup>

The equivocation of Guicciardini's political stance is reflected in the *Dialogue on the Government of Florence*, whose republican idealism seems equally at odds with its political pragmatism and *realpolitik*. The problems Guicciardini faced in the 1520s in writing what Sasso calls 'this brief but complex' work<sup>4</sup> make it, as we have seen, deliberately ambiguous and difficult to decode. For if we adopt a republican reading and identify Guicciardini with the idealism of Book II, we would interpret del Nero's defence of Medici tyranny in Book I as Guicciardini's safeguard against the danger of alienating his papal

<sup>3</sup> J. Nardi, *Istorie di Firenze*, Florence 1858, II, pp. 335–74 at p. 350; G. B. Busini, letter to B. Varchi (30 May 1550), in *Lettere*, ed. G. Milanese, Florence, 1860, p. 220.

<sup>4</sup> *Per Francesco Guicciardini*, p. 183; cf. Silvano, 'Gli uomini da bene', p. 861.

employers; whereas if we identify Guicciardini with del Nero's position in Book I, we would read Book II as his protection against a possible republican restoration. Revisions to the first draft suggest that he modified criticism both of the Medici and of the republican regimes. After 1527, however, the republican restoration and his banishment as a rebel in 1529 made the parallel between his position and del Nero's very evident. Perhaps, as Sasso has suggested,<sup>5</sup> it was already in Guicciardini's mind when he was writing the *Dialogue*.

It purports to represent a discussion held in the villa of Bernardo del Nero just after the revolution of November 1494, which replaced the 'narrow' regime headed by Piero de' Medici with a more 'open' regime, under the control of a Great Council of some three-and-a-half thousand members. Bernardo del Nero, the former Medici supporter beheaded in 1497 for failing to reveal a pro-Medicean conspiracy, defends the Medici regime against the charges of the other younger participants, who in varying degrees all represent republican opposition to the Medici. Piero Capponi, a key figure in the downfall of the Medici and in the new regime, is a representative of the old mercantile aristocracy of Florence, the so-called *ottimati*, or optimates, who had governed Florence since the 1380s; Pagolantonio Soderini and Piero Guicciardini (the author's father) participate as citizens who played an influential role in consultative discussions after 1494, Pagolantonio as a leading Savonarolan and Piero Guicciardini as a more cautious supporter of the Savonarolan regime and also, as Ficino's pupil, the 'academic' voice in the *Dialogue*.

Ever since Cosimo de' Medici's return from exile in 1434, the Medici party had been narrowing the basis of power in Florence. It was gradually undermining the authority of the old-established councils of the People and Commune by replacing them with other, smaller councils, or by using special legislative powers, or *balìa*, to bypass them altogether. At the same time it controlled elections to offices through the use of select scrutineers, or *accoppiatori*. This regime was overthrown in November 1494, as a reaction against the Medici's growing autocracy and the incompetence of Piero de' Medici when faced with the French invasion. It was replaced initially by a government controlled by twenty optimates (among them, Piero Capponi); and then, after the intervention of the Dominican monk

<sup>5</sup> *Per Francesco Guicciardini*, pp. 189-94; cf. pp. 172-9.



Savonarola, by a more open regime drawn from members of an enlarged Great Council of major office-holders over four generations, which became a potent symbol of the new republican regime. The *Dialogue* thus claims to represent a discussion about the rival merits of liberty, or open government, and restricted, or narrow government, based on 'the actual conversation' once held by its participants. Yet in approaching it, we must remember that del Nero, 'almost like an oracle' (p. 3), is allowed to enjoy the benefit of foresight in predicting the outcome of the 1494 revolution some 30 years after the events he describes. And since the argument for liberty is presented by members of the oligarchy which had replaced the guild regime in 1382 and had collaborated closely with the Medici after 1434, the issues are inevitably less clear-cut – and more interesting – than the antilogical form of the *Dialogue* initially suggests.

The *Dialogue* opens with a general discussion about the nature of revolutions and how to judge them. Whereas del Nero as a Medicean argues that such political upheavals always do more harm than good to a city, Soderini defends the 1494 revolution by distinguishing it from other types of political change, which he condemns for their factionalism. What he condemns are changes or *alterazioni* like those of 1433 and 1434 (when Cosimo de' Medici was exiled and restored to power), or those of 1466 and 1478 (following the Pitti and Pazzi Conspiracies), which simply transferred power within the ruling elite or increased its political control. Quite different, he argues, are revolutions or *mutazioni* that transform 'one species of government into another' (p. 7), such as the 1494 overthrow of the Medici regime, which restored liberty to the people. Although historians still argue about the extent to which the 1494 revolution in Florence differed from earlier changes, we can all today readily understand the issue at stake: the merits and demerits of overturning restrictive or 'narrow' governments in the name of popular freedom.

Soderini's suggestion that del Nero is also secretly pleased by the restoration of liberty in Florence encourages del Nero to define his position and social status. Unlike the other speakers, he does not belong to one of the old optimate families, 'not being of noble birth nor surrounded by relatives' as they are, nor is he well-educated. Instead, he is a self-made man who has become their political equal through his own efforts and through the patronage and friendship of the Medici. This serves to alert us to the fact that his approach to politics is going to be far from traditional. We should not be misled

by the fact that it is he who first introduces the traditional scholastic argument that, of the three types of government – of the one, the few and the many – government of one man when good is the best. For he does so only to undermine it by insisting, against the scholar Piero Guicciardini, that in fact governments must be judged by results, not by principles.

Judging only by results, del Nero is able to argue that there is no difference between legitimate and illegitimate regimes *ex titulo* (one of Bartolus of Sassoferrato's two types of tyranny) since their claim to power is irrelevant to their ability to rule. In this way he destroys one of the time-honoured definitions of tyranny as the worst of the six types of government according to the scholastic typology. He then proceeds to replace this old typology with new simplified terms that can easily be understood 'by the man in the street' (p. 12; they are discussed more fully on pp. xxv–xxvi below). But his distinction between what he colloquially calls 'broad' and 'narrow' government is not only easily comprehensible to all levels of Florentine society. It also enables him usefully to gloss over the old distinction between optimate government 'of the few' and Medici one-man government. According to his classification, instead of being different types altogether, the difference is simply one of degree.

Equally novel is his attack on Capponi's argument, based on Florence's long history and reputation as a free commune, that free and open government is the city's natural form of rule and therefore the best for it. On the contrary, del Nero responds, free communes were not introduced 'to allow everyone to participate in government', but simply 'to safeguard the laws and the common good', which is best achieved by one man, if he is good (p. 17). And far from being natural to the city, he continues, Capponi's much-vaunted freedom and equality is in fact no more than a slogan, used as a means of social advancement by the outs to get into power, and then discarded by them once they have achieved their objective (pp. 36–7). By distinguishing between civil and political liberty, and then by reductively defining liberty and equality as techniques for social advancement, del Nero offers a radical attack on the republican myth, which he then uses to undermine Capponi's patriotic defence of communal 'freedom' and noble virtue.

After this innovative introduction, which marks del Nero's importance in the *Dialogue*, the remainder of the first book is devoted to a discussion of the pros and cons of Medici government according to

the three headings proposed by Capponi: the administration of justice, the distribution of honours and offices (which includes an interesting discussion of methods of taxation), and foreign policy. While Capponi condemns the Medici on each count for their favouritism and self-interest, del Nero defends them on the grounds that knowing favouritism is preferable to ignorant incompetence, and the Medici's successful self-interestedness preferable to the factionalism and disorder created by the optimates' destructive competition for honour and glory, what Sasso calls a 'Hobbesian' free-for-all.<sup>6</sup> Although not obviously original, since much of the material is familiar from Guicciardini's *History of Florence*, the interest of this long discussion lies in its combination of the general and the specific – its illustration of general political arguments (for example, popular government's lack of secrecy and expertise) with specific Florentine examples. Particularly interesting is its overall account of the Medici patronage, or 'Big Boss', system of government, which is marked by favours or 'considerations' (*rispetti*) paid to friends and 'satellites' (*satelliti*), 'jobs for the boys' (*pascere gli amici*), corrupt practices (*aggiramenti*), organised gangs and chiefs (*capi*) in the countryside, and control of enemies through marriage and tax manipulation.

Del Nero's portrait of Lorenzo de' Medici in the *Dialogue* has been described by Felix Gilbert and Nicolai Rubinstein as Lorenzo's 'posthumous image', which became the source of the 'mythic Golden Age' Lorenzo.<sup>7</sup> But what is striking is its often unflattering realism and the amount of agreement between del Nero and his republican critics about Lorenzo's role. As del Nero comments, there was a danger that 'we'll find ourselves agreeing too closely with each other' (p. 58). Describing Lorenzo pragmatically as a man who knew his job, because 'this was the trade in which he'd set up shop', del Nero provides the most telling evidence of Lorenzo's abuse of power in admitting that he gave offices to men who then 'obeyed his signals', kept careful watch on people's behaviour, so that 'pleasing him acted as a reward and being in his bad books served as a punishment', and used taxes 'as a stick to beat people with' (pp. 23, 54, 49). So when Capponi proceeds to describe Lorenzo's malpractices in greater detail, it is no surprise to find that nearly all of them can be substanti-

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> See Bibliographical note below.

ated by other evidence. We know that Lorenzo influenced legislation and elections on behalf of friends and supporters, brought pressure to bear on the decisions of the Mercantile Court (see Bibliographical note, p. xxxvi) and the criminal court of eight citizens, the Eight of Ward, and enjoyed special powers and privileges, like the right to bear arms, which were denied to other citizens. Lorenzo also signed military contracts and treaties single-handed and laid 'his hands on communal funds' as Capponi puts it (p. 30), incurring a debt with the communal Monte of over 22,000 florins by the time of his death.

It seems likely that many details of this portrait were supplied to Guicciardini by his father and grandfather Jacopo, or were contained in family papers – such as Lorenzo's personal intervention in the surrender of Pietrasanta in 1484, when Jacopo was Florentine commissary, or his use of communal money, which Jacopo as a Monte treasurer would also have known about. Thus we find ourselves presented, not with opposing images of Lorenzo, but with a single and convincingly realistic image of the political broker and power-monger, a man familiar to all our participants. Far from dismissing it as a flattering myth, we should read this dialogic portrait as an accurate picture of Lorenzo, his two faces, far from being merely a literary construct, betraying the optimates' ambivalence towards the man they both collaborated with and resented. The truth was, as they all knew, that their own prosperity to a large extent depended on Lorenzo's dominance.

When the argument is resumed the following day and del Nero is persuaded to describe his ideal government, we expect something more innovative than what we are given, which is a blueprint for a government on the Venetian model: a life Gonfalonier at its head, a life senate of 150 men, in whom real power is vested, an executive magistracy of ten, with an elected advisory *pratica*, and a Great Council, as well as an appeal court of forty. Most of its features – with the exception only of the senate, which was briefly introduced after Soderini's fall in September 1512 – had in fact been introduced by the reforms of 1502. It was then, after lengthy debate about the rival merits of a life head of state or a life senate, that the two-monthly office of Gonfalonier of Justice was transformed into an elective life office and the Quarantia established as a court of appeal in place of the Great Council (p. 124, n. 316). It is Soderini, rather than del Nero, who first presents the argument that in all states, both classical



and contemporary, 'it is always the virtue of a few people that counts', for only a few are capable of attaining true glory and honour (p. 91). But because del Nero's scheme closely resembles the government Guicciardini proposed in his *Logrognò Discourse* of 1512, 'On how to order the popular government', especially in its desire for government to be in the hands of 'men of worth', *uomini da bene*, represented by a senate drawn from old optimate families like his own, it has been taken to represent not only the views of del Nero and the other disputants, but Guicciardini's too. As Pocock points out,<sup>8</sup> it is here that del Nero approximates most closely to aristocratic values in accepting ambition and the desire for honour as virtues – provided they are exercised and rewarded in a public arena. His argument climaxes in a paean of praise for optimate government, where the ruler freely steps down to allow the best men to win true honour and glory through exercising public offices for the good of their country, the *Dialogue* concluding with the hope that del Nero's 'lucid and wise' discourse will enlighten the whole city and be acted on in the speakers' lifetime (p. 168).

This reading of the *Dialogue* as a republican tract that reflects Guicciardini's own optimate ideals has met with widespread approval. In simultaneously providing a career structure open to talent and restricting power to a small elite, it reassures us about Guicciardini's republicanism and at the same time is consistent with the early-modern trend towards greater elitism. In 1459 the Signoria of Florence had been renamed 'priors of liberty' instead of 'priors of the guilds', since this title (the law states) had suggested that 'humble and abject people, the lowest of the low' had 'worked their way into government'. The guilds were subsequently given a reduced role in government, which became restricted to fewer longer-term and more experienced citizens, ruling in the interests of the rich banking and merchant class. Guicciardini's blueprint reflects these trends in its disparagement of 'workshop' values and its attempt to deprive tradespeople of an active role in government, which he wanted to be limited to experts, wise men ruling in the interests of the state as a whole.

Yet there are problems in accepting this as the only reading of the *Dialogue*. This is partly because of the difficulty of accepting its republican rhetoric at face value. As the leading ideology of the day,

<sup>8</sup> Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 248–251, 258–261.

piously invoked by the government in prefaces to laws and two-monthly orations on justice, its claim to provide wise, impartial government was belied by the self-interest of rich banking and merchant optimates like Guicciardini himself, as his discussion of taxation can serve to illustrate. Fearing that the people will 'overburden the better-off' and that a tax or *catasto*, based on a written return of all sources of wealth, would be 'dishonest' if it forced merchants to publicise their 'true state of affairs', del Nero prefers the Medici's arbitrary methods of assessment, which, though dangerous if used as 'a stick to beat people with', nevertheless operated in the best economic interests of the merchant class – and therefore, as he would claim, of the state as a whole (pp. 49–50).

Such a reading also fails to do justice to the *Dialogue's* apparent novelties and the ambiguity of del Nero's role in it. It is difficult to reconcile the unconcealed admirer of the Medicean system in Book I with the republican sage in Book II, or to explain his radicalism in both books. For after undermining the old distinctions between good and bad government in Book I, del Nero further erodes the moral basis of political power towards the end of Book II, where he outspokenly argues that, 'for reason of state', political power inevitably depends on unchristian actions like murdering prisoners of war and placing bounties on human heads. Here, and in his later defence of Alessandro de' Medici's rule, Guicciardini is as iconoclastic as Machiavelli in arguing for a divorce between the worlds of politics and religion. Perhaps not surprisingly, del Nero warns the other disputants against publicising his views on Christian morality and on the difficulty of living in the world 'without offending God', for 'we can cope with this argument among ourselves, but we shouldn't however use it with others, nor where there are more people' (p. 159).

So there is no easy or straightforward republican reading of the *Dialogue*. Few historians today accept De Caprariis' 'Crocean' suggestion that the contrast between Books I and II represents Guicciardini's retreat 'from politics to history';<sup>9</sup> but by emphasising its political relevance as a whole, they exacerbate the problem of defining what its purpose was. In view of Guicciardini's difficult situation, it is interesting to note that on two occasions (in the preface and in the first draft of the beginning of Book II) Piero Guicciardini is described

<sup>9</sup> See Bibliographical note below.

as a passive participant in the discussion, who 'won't want to let himself be understood' (pp. 3, 83, n. 228). So if Guicciardini wished to protect himself, then of course the ambiguity of the Ciceronian dialogue form, which presents both sides of the political debate without concluding in favour of either, served his purposes very well. He was not influenced only by humanist models, however. As a lawyer as well as a humanist by training, he was skilled in adversarial techniques, and it is likely that his legal career, as Osvaldo Cavallar has suggested,<sup>10</sup> exercised an important influence on his political thinking. We know that his admiration for the adversarial court and for the practice of publishing arguments in advance provided models for his projected government, to enable citizens to arrive at the truth and win fame and reputation by 'presenting themselves well'. And on the evidence of the two orations he wrote in 1527, one accusing himself of imagined charges of malpractice, the other defending himself, it was his habitual practice to argue both sides of the question and to formulate his ideas as opposites, as when he suggests that 'everyone necessarily either loves liberty or he loves the tyrant, and if he loves one, he must hate the other' (*Oratio accusatoria*, p. 219). So if the *Dialogue* purposely offers an open choice, it would perhaps be wrong to impose on it a single reading or interpretation.

An open reading also has the advantage of making the *Dialogue* accessible to a wide audience, as a discussion of political principles instead of simply one of Florentine politics. Yet in accepting it, as in accepting the 'safe' republican reading, we risk missing the more dangerous implications of the work that Guicciardini apparently wanted to conceal by using the ambiguous dialogue form. For just as his two-faced portrait of Lorenzo concealed a single coherent image of the man, so his dialogue about politics in Books I and II may conceal a more pragmatic and integrated argument than either of the above approaches indicates. So without attempting to suggest a single or uniform interpretation, we may be able to discover the prevailing direction of its argument by clarifying some of its special features.

In the first place, it is clear that Guicciardini's preferred government is not a hereditary aristocracy limited to the optimates, as it

<sup>10</sup> O. Cavallar, *Francesco Guicciardini Giurista. I Ricordi degli Onorari*, Milan, 1991, pp. 8-9.

might appear, but rather a meritocracy. Florentine history had amply demonstrated that the weakness of aristocratic government lay in its factionalism and competitiveness, from which the optimate regime of 1382–1434 (idealised by Capponi) was saved only by external wars and reaction to the Ciompi revolt. So although political power in Guicciardini's model is concentrated in the hands of a life senate of 150 men, who exercise the key political, financial and judicial functions in the state, final legislative power rests in the hands of the popular Great Council, which also appoints to other offices. At the same time, the practical authority of the senate and its executive of Ten is moderated both by the life Gonfalonier and by a *pratica*, or *junta*, chosen from the senate by outside electors. Life membership of the senate is won not by birth but by previous performance in administrative offices and public debate. For as Guicciardini says in his *Considerations on the 'Discourses' of Machiavelli*: 'the optimates must not be drawn always from the same lines and families, but from the whole body of the city . . . and a senate must be elected to deal with difficult matters, containing the flower of the prudent noble and rich men of the city'.<sup>11</sup>

There is no better way to illustrate what Guicciardini meant by this than by considering Bernardo del Nero's role in the *Dialogue*. One reason for being chosen as Guicciardini's *alter ego* could have been, as Sasso has suggested,<sup>12</sup> his fate in being victimised as a Medicean in 1497, which Guicciardini may have feared would be his own fate, and which he tried to avert through the argument of the *Dialogue*. In birth and social status, however, as Giovanni Silvano has been the first person to stress,<sup>13</sup> del Nero was very different from Guicciardini: not an optimate at all but an artisan, a second-hand clothes dealer, whom Guicciardini had earlier listed as one of Lorenzo de' Medici's clients who owed his position to Lorenzo's patronage alone. Although called 'extremely cruel and extremely ambitious' before his execution in 1497, there is no doubt he was a man of ability and judgement, who enjoyed important political offices in the Medici, as well as in the republican, regime. He was also well-read – although, as he says in the *Dialogue*, ignorant of Latin. Like Socrates in Plato's dialogues,

<sup>11</sup> *Selected Writings*, ed. C. and M. Grayson, Oxford, 1965, p. 65.

<sup>12</sup> See note 5 above.

<sup>13</sup> 'Gli uomini da bene', pp. 862–3.

he is clearly intended to represent the practical wisdom of the common man. So if he and another Medici upstart, the unpopular Antonio di Mimiato Dini, are described in the *Dialogue* as 'wise men' (pp. 3, 72 (notes), 126) and del Nero is also 'a man of worth', its ruling elite is certainly not intended to be closed but open to all men of talent, to whom it offered access to the top honours.

At the same time it is not a popular government either, despite del Nero's origins and the important role in Guicciardini's argument of the Great Council (consisting of all the citizens, now defined as the major office-holders over four generations). In Book 1, he had criticised the new Great Council for encouraging tradespeople and workers to enter the government, as he had in the *Logroño Discourse*. There, following the example of the Romans, he had wanted the members of an enlarged Great Council to appoint to offices without being qualified to exercise them (pp. 224–5). In Book II of the *Dialogue* he allows the Great Council to approve all laws without discussion and appoint to all offices (apart from the Gonfaloniership and the senate, which are to be nominated by the senate and then approved by the Great Council; and ambassadors, commissaries and the Ten of War, to be appointed by a special electoral council or *junta*). But he deprives it of any other powers, 'because I don't trust the judgement of the people, nor would I ever recommend them being allowed to decide any affair of importance' (p. 153). He also disparages them for loving the tyrant's 'festivals, jousts and public games', as well as the magnificence of his house and court, 'which are the things that appeal to the lowest classes' (p. 160). In his *Maxims* (C 140, Appendix, p. 174 below), as well as in the *Considerations* (pp. 102–6), he describes the common people as 'a mad animal gorged with a thousand and one errors and confusions'. So although Guicciardini valued the people's role in curbing the senate, and pragmatically recognised that 'now that they have had a taste of the Great Council . . . And so set their hearts on their free government . . . there's no hope of getting them to forget it' (Maxim 38, p. 172 below), he otherwise had a low opinion of their ability.

Guicciardini's negative view of the people is reinforced by comparing his views with Machiavelli's. Although Machiavelli is alluded to only once in the *Dialogue*, for arguing that the excellence of Rome's army depended on its excellent administration, he is present throughout *in absentia* – providing the 'other' voice in the dialogue through

Piero Guicciardini, who scrupulously presents 'the authentic thought of his great fellow-citizen'.<sup>14</sup> Whereas Machiavelli's model is Rome, Guicciardini's is Venice. Whereas Machiavelli admires Roman conflicts, the role of the tribune of the plebs, and the militia, Guicciardini thought the conflicts were destructive, the tribunes far less effective than the kings in protecting the people and advancing their rights, and the militia successful only because it was established under its kings, well-disciplined and highly reputed – which would not be the case if Florence were to establish a citizen militia. Since the tribunate (in Florence, the office of Captain of the People, abolished in 1477) and the militia were symbols of popular government, Guicciardini's hostility to them marks him as antipopular by comparison with Machiavelli.

The remaining figure in Guicciardini's government is the elected head of state or life Gonfalonier. Although in the *Dialogue* this figure is subordinate to the senate, which is the real centre of power, in the Medicean state (as in Machiavelli's 1520 blueprint) the position is of course occupied by the Medici themselves. After his experience of Piero Soderini's life office, we cannot know how confident Guicciardini was of the life Gonfalonier's capacity to control the optimates (especially since he attributes Soderini's fall in his *Oratio accusatoria*, p. 228, to his 'negligence, or patience or pusillanimity'), or of their capacity to control a powerful Gonfalonier. It is revealing, perhaps, that he refers to the life Gonfalonier as 'a boss or patron . . . not a lord who rules, but someone who being a fixture will necessarily devote the thought and care to the city's affairs that bosses give to their own affairs' (p. 101), since these are the terms Guicciardini uses to describe Lorenzo's role in the city, not Soderini's. He knew, too, that because of their wealth and status in Rome, the Medici could not realistically be exiled from Florence for ever, so he proposed what he describes as his 'new way of doing things', that is, recalling them to Florence once the republic was firmly established (p. 167).

Guicciardini's description of the life Gonfalonier's role as a boss or patron, not a lord, also suggests that he was aware of the later distinction made between the spheres of public and private interest. It may be objected that since he does not use this vocabulary, we cannot legitimately use it either. However, both Guicciardini and

<sup>14</sup> Sasso, *Per Francesco Guicciardini*, p. 105.

Machiavelli do use the public/private antithesis to contrast constitutional or public authority with private ambition and favouritism. And it is clear from Machiavelli's reiteration of this antithesis in his writings that he uses the words public and private to make exactly the distinction Guicciardini makes in the *Dialogue* between the Medici's constitutional authority and their private use of partisans, chiefs and favourites. Thus Machiavelli contrasts Neri Capponi's public route to power with Cosimo's 'public and private' route, through friends and 'partisans' (*Florentine Histories*, bk. II, ch. 2); and in the *Discourses* (bk. I, ch. 16) he recognises that one of the great weaknesses of republican government is its inability to win the support of grateful partisans, since everyone expects rewards and honours as his due without any sense of obligation to the government. It was perhaps with this weakness in mind that Guicciardini on several occasions after 1512 and 1530 urged the Medici to create partisans in Florence to solidify their authority through bonds of obligation. In contrast to Machiavelli, however, who consistently condemns this fusion of public and private interest, Guicciardini seems precociously aware that it may be necessary, in order to recreate the stability achieved by Lorenzo de' Medici's semi-public, semi-private role in Florence.

Such other clues as we have suggest that the direction of Guicciardini's thought was towards the concentration of power in a strong head, whether this head was a senate or a prince. These clues include his new political vocabulary, which glossed over the old distinction between good and bad government, his tough views about the reality of power, and his conviction that 'in Florence power must necessarily either be held by one man alone or pass totally into the hands of the people'. They also include his admiration for monarchy in Rome, as well as his later support for Alessandro's rule in Florence, and his frankly-admitted enjoyment, in his self-accusation, of his own magnificence and 'unbounded authority' as papal governor, having 'received more favours from the Medici than any other citizen' (*Oratio accusatoria*, pp. 207, 209-10; cf. Maxim C 107, p. 173 below). Because affairs of state, the 'serious matters', are confined to the senate, which acts as mediator, we should perhaps hesitate to call his government 'mixed' in balancing power equally between its three constituent parts. Yet at the same time it is novel in insisting that all these parts contribute to government in varying degrees. Reading the *Dialogue* as a whole, we can see that Guicciardini, like Machiavelli in his

1520 *Discourse*, realistically acknowledges the need for power to be concentrated in the hands of a single head, the Medici – ‘during their lifetimes’, as Machiavelli put it – or a senate of wise men. Despite loving liberty and republicanism more than tyranny, he did business with both types of regime, like del Nero, who must remain the key to an integrated understanding of the *Dialogue*.

### Texts and editions

There are two surviving manuscripts of the *Dialogue*, both in the Guicciardini family archives in Florence (described by R. Ridolfi, *L'Archivio della famiglia Guicciardini*, Florence, 1931). One, the first draft, is entirely autograph (A). The second is a later version in a secretary's hand (B), which has been corrected by the author (C), making C the definitive version. The dialogue has been published in three editions, by G. Canestrini in Guicciardini's *Opere inedite* (vol. II, Florence, 1858), by R. Palmarocchi (Bari, 1932), who provides a full critical edition with alternative readings from A and B, and most recently by E. L. Scarano (UTET, Turin, 1970). In my translation I have followed Palmarocchi, adopting his nomenclature and his use of C for the printed text, and quoting variant readings from A and B where they throw light on C or provide interesting evidence of changes of thought. From this point of view, the earlier versions of the preface (Palmarocchi, pp. 295–301, printed in an Appendix by Scarano, pp. 475–83) are particularly valuable, and for this reason they have been described in expanded footnotes to the preface. The reader should not be deterred either by the Jamesian convolutions of the preface, nor by its bulky footnotes, since both are untypical of what follows.

### Language and concepts

There was at the time a long-standing debate in Florence about how to translate Florentine political terminology into Latin – should new words be invented or classical words used instead, and, indeed, should Latin be used at all? By writing his *Histories* and this *Dialogue* in Italian, not Latin, Guicciardini was already departing from the practice of most humanist scholars, as he was in rejecting scholastic terminology to define types of government in this *Dialogue*. After



introducing this terminology, which distinguishes between six types of good and bad government of 'the one, the few or the many' (kings, aristocracies and polities ruling for the common good, tyrants, oligarchies and democracies ruling for their own self-interest), and more broadly between oligarchy and democracy, representing wealth and poverty (pp. 10–13), Guicciardini purposely discards it in favour of new words which more accurately describe his view of Florentine political history. This he saw not so much as a cycle of constantly-changing regimes, according to the classical formulation, but rather as a series of subtle and constantly-changing shifts in the balance of power between openness, *larghezza*, and narrowness, *strettezza*. Thus at one end of the scale, the 1290s guild regime and the 1490s Savonarolan regime could be seen to represent broad or open government, while the oligarchic government in Florence from 1382–1434, as well as the almost one-man government under Lorenzo de' Medici, represent narrow or 'very narrow' government. Because of the imprecision and fluidity of the political situation at this time, these words offered a sliding-scale which was not only conveniently mobile but was also non-moral, thus avoiding the need to distinguish clearly between republican, oligarchic and tyrannical government. Yet the significance of Guicciardini's use of these words has been largely lost, thanks to translators and commentators who have either attempted to force them into ill-fitting classical clothing (*stato stretto* has been translated as 'despotism', or 'absolutism', as well as optimate government) – or else, more commonly, have left them untranslated. It is important, however, to respect Guicciardini's language by avoiding scholastic terminology and adopting his 'new' but vulgarly colloquial words – such as *largo* and *stretto*, which had popular religious and sexual, as well as political, connotations, and were readily understood by the man in the street. Hence I have nearly always translated *stato largo* or *libero* as a broad or free regime/government, *stato stretto* as a narrow one. Just because they do not belong to a typology familiar to us, they convey the novelty and effect intended by Guicciardini.

Guicciardini uses three other words, fortune, humours and virtue (*fortuna*, *umori* and *virtù* in the Glossary), which together help to define his mental world. Although it is Capponi who distinguishes himself from the other participants in the *Dialogue* for having practically no learning, 'apart from a bit of astrology picked up from his

father' (pp. 10–11), Guicciardini himself – despite the whiggish rationalism of the *Dialogue* and his numerous maxims about 'the madness of those who believe in astrology' (Maxims C 23, 57, 58, 114, 207 and B 170) – was evidently more influenced by popular astrology than we might think. In Anthony Parel's convincing account of Machiavelli's cosmos,<sup>15</sup> Machiavelli believed that the cyclical pattern of history was caused by the influence of the unchanging planets on cities and men, change being introduced by the play of fortune, which affects countries and people differently according to their humours and temperament. Although differing in emphasis, Guicciardini's account of the cycle of history in the *Dialogue*, in which 'everything which exists at present has existed before' (p. 16), resembles Machiavelli's, as does his account of the natural life-cycle of cities, which are difficult to reform when old (pp. 140, 148–9, 153), his frequent use of bodily and medical analogies (pp. 41, 62, 97–9, 157), and his attempt to find the right government for Florence 'after considering the nature, the quality, the conditions, the inclinations – in a word, the humours of the city and its citizens' (p. 97). We know from the *Dialogue* that his own father had a 'melancholic, balanced and happy disposition, according to Marsilio Ficino' (p. 11), and he evidently agreed with Machiavelli about the importance of being born at the right time, 'when your own special virtues or qualities are valued' and on the virtual impossibility of changing one's nature 'according to the times', to escape fortune's thrall (Maxim 31, pp. 171–2; cf. pp. 81 and 141, and Maxim 216, p. 174 below). For fortune is 'just as influential as many believe', or at least 'quite powerful in ensuring that things are born in time to enjoy the right company and occasion to be able to achieve their effect' (pp. 139, 148). Anyone who tries to escape the power of fortune through change and revolution incurs her anger, 'in whose dominion these things lie' (p. 84). And although fortune can bring success and prosperity if she smiles on the city, her cornucopia is not unlimited and can be used up (pp. 139, 148–9, 90). He also talks of the impossibility of 'escaping one's fate', of the natural cycle of human affairs and, 'as you others like to say, of fate, which very often has more force than men's reason or prudence' (pp. 3, 140, 79–80); and of 'the dispositions of the heavens and

<sup>15</sup> *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, New Haven and London, 1992; cf. Pocock, *Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 31–48.

destiny' being more important than counsel in bringing about Piero de' Medici's fall (p. 10).

Guicciardini's use of the words fate and fortune suggest that he shared the same view of the world as Machiavelli. Yet his emphasis on the particular and the exceptional enabled him to avoid the determinism of Machiavelli's rules and generalisations, nor does he apparently share the paganism that Parel attributes to Machiavelli. For although he was as critical of the Roman Church and its clergy as Machiavelli, he did not rule out the power of God's providence in influencing events. On one occasion he refers to 'fortune, or God's goodness', on another to Italy's situation after the French invasion being 'more or less in the hands of God', and elsewhere he states that 'God loves liberty.' (pp. 135, 70, 91). Despite finding it difficult to accept that goodness and evil were not rewarded and punished by God, he still thought it impossible that 'divine justice', or God (as the first draft A has it), would allow the Medici exiles to be put to death as outlaws, when they themselves had killed no one (p. 163; cf. *Maxims C* 91, 92). His view of man's natural goodness and virtue also differs from Machiavelli's. Virtue, or individual merit, which can bring success independently of fortune, is for Guicciardini a moral or civic quality, closely associated with the performance of deeds that benefit the republic, rather than Machiavellian ability or prowess. It remains difficult to know how Guicciardini reconciled these different elements in his cosmos. Despite his lucidity of thought and expression, his penetrating but sceptical comments on the world suggest that his beliefs are as unfathomable as his God, whom he describes, in the words of the Bible, as 'a profound abyss' (*Maxim C* 92, quoting from *Romans* 11:33). It is this combination of qualities that makes him one of the most important and challenging writers in the early-modern period.

## Principal events in Guicciardini's life

- 1483 6 *March*: born in Florence
- 1492 8 *April*: death of Lorenzo de' Medici
- 1494 9 *November*: expulsion of Piero de' Medici from Florence  
2 *December* : *parlamento* overthrows the Medicean regime  
23 *December*: creation of the Great Council.
- 1497 *August*: decapitation of Bernardo del Nero and four other conspirators
- 1498 *May*: death at the stake of Fra Girolamo Savonarola
- 1498 *November*: Guicciardini begins to study civil law
- 1502 *September*: election of Piero Soderini as first life Gonfalonier
- 1505 *November*: Guicciardini receives doctorate in civil law
- 1507 *January*: Guicciardini's betrothal with Maria Salviati secretly concluded
- 1508 *April*: begins to write his *Ricordanze*, then his *Family Memoirs* and *The History of Florence*  
*May*: marriage publicised (celebrated on 2 November)  
*June*: attends first *pratica*, which also included his father
- 1509 *February*: opens his *Ricordi degli onorari*
- 1512 *January*: leaves Florence for his legation to Spain  
27 *August*: completes his *Discourse on How to Order the Popular Government of Florence* in Logroño in Spain and the first version of the *Maxims*  
31 *August*: fall of Soderini's government in Florence.  
7 *September*: law establishing a Senate to replace the Council of 80

*Principal events in Guicciardini's life*

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- 16 September: *Balia* restores the Medici and their regime
- 1513 March: Giovanni de' Medici elected Pope Leo X
- 1514 January: returns from his embassy in Spain  
March: replaces his father as one of the Seventeen Reformers  
August: appointed one of the Eight of Ward  
September–October: appointed one of the Signoria
- 1515 December: appointed a Consistorial Advocate by Leo X
- 1516 June: appointed papal Governor of Modena
- 1517 July: appointed papal Governor of Reggio as well as Modena
- 1519 May: death of Lorenzo de' Medici, Duke of Urbino
- 1521 July: appointed Commissary General of the papal army against the French. Begins to write *Dialogue on the Government of Florence* and the second version of the *Maxims*  
1 December: death of Leo X
- 1523 November: Giulio de' Medici elected Pope Clement VII
- 1524 April: appointed papal President of the Romagna. Completes the *Dialogue*
- 1526 June: appointed papal Lieutenant General in the war against the Emperor
- 1527 April: uprising in Florence demanding restoration of 1512 constitution suppressed  
May: Sack of Rome by imperial troops. Republican government restored in Florence  
Retires to villa to write *Accusatoria* and *Defensoria* and later the *Cose fiorentine*
- 1529 June: Treaty of Barcelona forces Pope to restore Medici to Florence
- 1530 Guicciardini is accused of contumacy and exiled from the Florentine state  
Writes *Considerations on the 'Discourses' of Machiavelli* and the final version of the *Maxims*  
August: capitulation of the Florentine republic. Guicciardini is appointed one of the Otto di Pratica  
October: Alessandro de' Medici appointed head of state by the Emperor
- 1531 January: appointed Vice-Legate and Governor of Bologna

*Principal events in Guicciardini's life*

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- 1532 *May*: Alessandro appointed Duke by Twelve Reformers  
(including Guicciardini) with authority derived from a  
*parlamento*
- 1534 *September*: Death of Clement VII. Guicciardini returns  
to Florence
- 1535-36 As Alessandro's advocate, rejects the exiles' charge of  
tyranny
- 1537 *January*: Alessandro murdered; succeeded by Cosimo de'  
Medici as head then Duke of Florence  
Writes *The History of Italy*
- 1540 22 *May*: dies

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#### Introduction: Guicciardini's life and writings

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#### Interpretations of the *Dialogue*

The most penetrating recent interpretation of Guicciardini's writings are the four studies of Gennaro Sasso printed in the volume *Per Francesco Guicciardini. Quattro Studi*, Rome, 1984, to which all page



citations refer. Of these the fourth, 'Sul *Dialogo del Reggimento di Firenze*', pp. 181-253, deals specifically with the *Dialogue*, while the other three are relevant in differing ways to its interpretation: 'I Volti del *Particolare*' (pp. 1-45, discussing Guicciardini's conceptual framework and beliefs; 'Guicciardini e Machiavelli' (pp. 47-157, also printed in *Francesco Guicciardini, 1483-1983. Nel V centenario della nascita*, Florence, 1984, pp. 3-130); 'L'Accusatoria, il 'Governo' di Piero Soderini e un riscontro Machiavelliano' (pp. 159-79). Also important is Giovanni Silvano's article, 'Gli uomini da bene di Francesco Guicciardini: coscienza aristocratica e repubblica a Firenze nel primo '500', *Archivio storico italiano*, 148 (1990), pp. 845-892, especially pp. 861-92; see also G. Cadoni, 'Per l'interpretazione del *Dialogo del Reggimento di Firenze* di Francesco Guicciardini', *Storia e politica*, 22 (1983), pp. 625-73, Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini*, above, pp. 117-21, 234-45, and N. Rubinstein, 'Guicciardini politico', in *Francesco Guicciardini, 1483-1983*, pp. 173-84. These should be read in conjunction with J. G. A. Pocock, *The Machiavellian Moment: Florentine Political Thought and the Atlantic Republican Tradition*, Princeton, 1975, (chs. 5 and 8, esp. pp. 221-71), which still offers the best account in English of Guicciardini's political language and stance within the aristocratic political tradition. For a clear assessment of Guicciardini's political realism, see D. Marrara, 'Il problema della tirannide nel pensiero di F.G. e di Francesco Vettori', *Rivista storica del diritto*, 39 (1966), pp. 99-154.

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Alison Brown, 'City and Citizens: Changing Perceptions in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries', in *City-States in Classical Antiquity and Medieval Italy*, ed. A. Molho *et al.*, Stuttgart and Ann Arbor, 1991, pp. 93-111 (*The Medici in Florence*, pp. 281-303); on platonism, J. Hankins, 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44 (1991), pp. 429-75, and Alison Brown, 'Platonism in Fifteenth-Century Florence and its Contribution to Early Modern Political Thought', *The Journal of Modern History*, 58 (1986), pp. 383-413 (*The Medici in Florence*, pp. 215-45). On language and models, M. Martelli, 'Un caso di "Amphibolatio": La canzone a Ballo "Ragionavasi di sodo"', *Lorenzo de' Medici Studi*, Florence, 1992, p. 329, and D. Marsh, *The Quattrocento Dialogue*, Cambridge, Mass., 1980. On particular concepts: Bartolus of Sassoferrato, *De tyrannia*, translated by E. Emerton, *Humanism and Tyranny: Studies in the Italian Trecento*, Gloucester, Mass., 1964, chs. 5-7, pp. 132-40; N. Rubinstein, 'Florentina Libertas', *Rinascimento*, 2nd.ser.26 (1986), pp. 3-26, and his 'Notes on the Word *stato* in Florence before Machiavelli', in *Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson*, ed. J. G. Rowe and W. H. Stockdale, Toronto, 1971, pp. 314-26; Q. Skinner, 'The State', in *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, ed. T. Ball, J. Farr and R. L. Hanson, Cambridge, 1989, pp. 6-23, and in the same volume, J. Dunn, 'Revolution', pp. 333-56. On Guicciardini's world, see A. Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, London, 1992, and Castagnola, *I Guicciardini e le scienze occulte*, pp. 3-7.

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by several of our wisest and most serious citizens. In order to commit it to memory by writing it down, I want to adopt the same manner and order as my father did, when he used to tell it to me. He was one of the speakers, even though – as would happen on most occasions – he preferred to listen to what the others had to say rather than give his own opinion.<sup>7</sup>

He thus told me several times about the occasion when he, with Piero Capponi and Pagolantonio Soderini, two citizens of great eminence and authority, went to our church<sup>8</sup> of S. Maria Impruneta several weeks after Piero de' Medici's expulsion in 1494 – whether to make a vow or to worship there I do not know.<sup>9</sup> On their return they visited Bernardo del Nero, who was by then very old and a man of great wisdom. Having been excluded from<sup>10</sup> public affairs on account of the great suspicion in which nearly all those in power during the Medici period were held, he was living tranquilly in his villa nearby. It is not easy to say which was stronger in my father, the pleasure he derived from remembering their discussion on this occasion, which was certainly very great, or the displeasure of thinking about Bernardo's unhappy end. Being so wise, Bernardo had, almost like an oracle, foreseen so many of the things that later happened. Perhaps because he was angered by some injury done to him by the popular regime, especially the very unfair taxes imposed on him, or because he despaired of the city – at that time deeply divided and in great confusion – ever returning to a well-ordered government, he liked to reflect on the political life of the city that had nourished him since his childhood, which he loved dearly. Or perhaps it was because it is impossible to escape one's fate. At any rate, he didn't know how to, or couldn't, block his ears sufficiently against whoever revealed to him the plans that were circulating to restore Piero de' Medici;

<sup>7</sup> According to A and B, his father preferred to listen to others, 'being the youngest of them all and not involved in the change of government that gave rise to the discussion'.

<sup>8</sup> *tempio*.

<sup>9</sup> The church possessed a miraculous painting of the Madonna, brought ceremonially into Florence at times of crisis, which made it a popular pilgrim shrine. See D. Herlihy, 'Santa Maria Impruneta: A Rural Commune in the Late Middle Ages', in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. N. Rubinstein, London, 1968, esp. p. 244. On the cult, see *Ricordo C* 124, ed. Spongano, p. 135, tr. Domandi, p. 72.

<sup>10</sup> *sequestrato*: 'isolated' or 'marginalised'. In fact he returned to office in 1497: see Biographical Notes.

and so he was decapitated, not because he was author or adviser of such plans but because he did not reveal them.<sup>11</sup>

But to get back to the subject. I also don't think I can be accused of ingratitude because of my deep, indeed extraordinary, debt to the Medici family, having been employed and excessively honoured by two popes from that family, first Leo and then Clement, who have treated me as a person in whom they have had – and in the case of Clement more than ever have – the greatest confidence.<sup>12</sup> In view of these obligations, to nourish thoughts against the position<sup>13</sup> of their family seems unfitting. One could not and should not infer from my writing, especially since it was done for my pleasure and recreation, with no intention of publication,<sup>14</sup> that I am opposed to their greatness, nor that their authority displeases me. For the same reason we would not want to argue that Xenophon, a citizen of Athens and, as we must suppose, a great patriot, disliked Athenian liberty because he wrote about princely government under the name of Cyrus;<sup>15</sup> or that Aristotle, the teacher of Alexander the Great, to whom he was greatly indebted, was his enemy because he wrote *The Politics*.

As if men's wishes and desires cannot differ from the way they reflect on or discuss affairs, or as if from this discussion it is apparent which of two badly ordered and corrupt governments I dislike less – were I not necessarily forced to be less critical of the one that has the most hope of being reformed.<sup>16</sup> Therefore if a well-structured and well-ordered regime were proposed that enjoyed genuine liberty,<sup>17</sup> it could not be held against me if I said I preferred it to all

<sup>11</sup> Bernardo was decapitated on 21 August 1497 after the failure of the conspiracy to restore Piero de' Medici to Florence.

<sup>12</sup> B elaborates (cf. note 4) by referring to the extremely important affairs he has undertaken for Leo and Clement and the honours and payments received from them, which demonstrate their confidence in him and his extraordinary obligation to them.

<sup>13</sup> *grandezza*: see Glossary.

<sup>14</sup> A, but not B, anticipates its possible publication 'before I grow old', saying that it would only merit criticism if it made him negligent of his other work, but since this was not the case, he should be praised for sacrificing his leisure time to benefiting others rather than himself – although to tell the truth, he derived recreation and pleasure from juxtaposing the violence and bloody cruelty of war with its opposites, peace, justice, equality and civil concord.

<sup>15</sup> The *Cyropaedia*: see Biographical Notes under Xenophon.

<sup>16</sup> A explains: 'if I had not been forced by reason to avoid the government with least possibility of reform', silence about which of two bad governments he dislikes least should not have been taken to mean he did not prefer a well-organised one best of all (see note 17 below).

<sup>17</sup> *con la libertà honestà*.

the others. For everyone is familiar with what philosophers write about our duty to our country and our duty to others; and since rewards and offices in political life are distinguished by degree,<sup>18</sup> one cannot be accused of ingratitude for taking more account of greater rather than lesser debts and obligations.<sup>19</sup> But leaving all these arguments and objections aside, let us begin the discussion, which I have written in the form of a dialogue in order to depart as little as possible from the truth and the actual form it took.

<sup>18</sup> *grado*: see Glossary.

<sup>19</sup> This contorted paragraph is clarified by A, which explains that apart from the difference between words and deeds (between writing about and actually changing regimes), 'my obligations to my country are greater than those to the Medici and it would be more detestable to be ungrateful to the former than the latter'. Both A and B go on to explain that since the Medici derive their authority from the papacy and not from the Florentine state, his work in their service is no evidence that he likes 'narrow' government or is unsuited to a civil way of life, for despite his wealth and wide powers, his personal life-style is extremely modest and incorruptible; nor should silence (were he not forced to break it; see above) about which of two badly governments was less displeasing be taken as evidence that he would not like a well-organised one best of all.

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## Book I

SPEAKERS: BERNARDO DEL NERO, PIERO  
CAPPONI, PAGOLANTONIO SODERINI AND  
PIERO GUICCIARDINI.

CAPPONI It has given us the greatest pleasure to come and visit this most holy place, but the chance of seeing you has made it even greater. Your absence from the Palace and the government of the city went far beyond what was called for, in our opinion, and of all the things to happen in the revolution<sup>20</sup> – for such it certainly was – this seemed quite the strangest.

SODERINI It is not just we who say so, who have always loved you and revered you as a father, but all discerning people<sup>21</sup> universally share the same opinion.

GUICCIARDINI Everyone is comforted, however, by knowing that the results produced at present, against all logic, by the nature of revolutions, will soon be corrected. When they realise how much they need your practical wisdom,<sup>22</sup> the very same men who are now happy to see you removed from public affairs will, once they have laid aside their passions and unnecessary suspicions, be the first to recall you and want the city to benefit from your counsel.

<sup>20</sup> *mutazione di stato sì grande*, see Glossary.

<sup>21</sup> *tutti quelli che hanno giudizio*; B: *gusto*.

<sup>22</sup> *prudenzia*: see Glossary.



**BERNARDO** The city is not so poor in men that it has at any time stood in need of my counsel, and especially now that my mind<sup>23</sup> is perhaps no less reduced and consumed by old age than my body. Not only must I not think of returning to the labours of the Palace, but if I were inside it, I would have to think of removing myself from it. I am indeed sorry that what I should have done voluntarily several years ago has been brought about by the revolution and expulsion of Piero de' Medici. This has been a source of grief to me, both on account of the affection I have always felt towards his family and much more because the experience of my long life has shown me that revolutions always do more harm than good to the city – as I could illustrate with many examples.

**CAPPONI** So why do you believe this revolution is harmful to the city?

**BERNARDO** In my experience, I tell you, changes always unsettle the city and have bad consequences.

**SODERINI** Yes, perhaps, when they are like the others during your lifetime, which should be called changes in personnel, or as you put it yourself 'alterations', rather than revolutions;<sup>24</sup> because in them either power was transferred from one citizen to another, or the authority of the ruler was increased by the civil disturbances. This was what happened in 1433 and 1434, in 1466, in 1478<sup>25</sup> and in all the other disturbances until this last one, which alone in your lifetime saw the mutation of one species of government into another one. When this happens and a species changes from bad to good, or from good to better, I don't see why the change mightn't be useful. If this was ever the case, it surely is now, when our city – by nature accustomed to freedom but reduced to servitude by the factionalism of its leading citizens – has recovered its natural and ancient liberty through the merits<sup>26</sup> of a few citizens, without bloodshed, destruction or notable scandals, only with the exile of the citizen who held it oppressed. I think you too share this opinion and, given your integrity and high-mindedness, you are no less pleased than we are, although perhaps

<sup>23</sup> lit. 'my counsel'.

<sup>24</sup> *mutazioni da uomo a uomo . . . alterazioni che mutazioni di stati.*

<sup>25</sup> Referring to the Medici party's exile and return in 1433 and 1434, and the Piti and Pazzi Conspiracies in 1466 and 1478.

<sup>26</sup> *virtù*: see Glossary.

because of the intimacy you have enjoyed with the Medici you think it more fitting to talk as you do.

**BERNARDO** I have no desire to spoil the pleasure that I know you take in seeing me, nor my very great pleasure in seeing you; on the contrary we should do all we can to increase it. So let us leave these discussions aside, since we are bound to get upset by arguing and disagreeing about matters of such importance, however amicably we do it, and instead talk of pleasanter things. Let's go, if you like, to see my estate. I will show you the many beautiful things I am planning to grow – no longer for myself but for those who will come after me. I will show you a design for a lovely building that could be constructed, though not by me, for in all the years I have laboured in politics, I have failed to earn enough readily to satisfy these desires. You will see how much pleasure I derive from agriculture and how honestly one can pass the time and profit from one's leisure. Leisure should be welcome to everyone when well used, but much more to someone who takes occasional respite after labouring long and hard in the public service.<sup>27</sup> Although one should take it sooner than I have done, and by choice not necessity, as seems to have happened to me, still, it's better to take it occasionally than never and in whatever way possible than not at all. Certainly I feel much more content in myself and tranquil here than I ever did when I was discharging public duties.

**GUICCIARDINI** Come on, for the love of God, give up this talk of leisure, since we are all sure your practical wisdom<sup>28</sup> is just as valuable to you in your retirement as it was when you were employed. Let us continue our earlier conversation. Far from being upsetting, it is bound to be extremely enjoyable, as a discussion – I won't say between friends, rather between father and sons, for this is how we regard our relationship. Speaking for myself, I don't know what greater pleasure I could have than hearing a man of great age and remarkable wisdom talking about public and civil affairs, especially since he has learnt these things not from books of philosophy but from his own experience and deeds, which is the true way to learn. I have always wanted such an occasion; and I think Piero Capponi and Pagolantonio feel just the same, for despite knowing more than I do, I'm sure they think they have a lot to learn from you.

<sup>27</sup> lit. 'in honourable undertakings', *faccende onorevoli*.

<sup>28</sup> *prudenzia*.

CAPPONI You've taken the words from my mouth, Piero, because nothing would please me more. I don't know what we could talk about that would be more useful and worthy of noble minds, not just now, in view of the present situation and near future, but always. And what better teacher could we have than Bernardo! Because of his perfect natural judgement and his extraordinary experience, due to his age and constant involvement in these affairs, I think he knows – to say the least – as much as any philosopher who has ever lived. Although Pagolantonio is silent, I can read from his face what he desires. So if you've ever wanted to please us and improve us with your teaching – as you often have done – I shall be bold enough to ask you, in the name of us all, to do today what Piero Guicciardini has asked you to do. And if at intervals we contradict you, it won't be to disagree with you, whom we consider our teacher and father, but to give you the chance of clarifying relevant topics. Agriculture, gardens and buildings can wait for another time; instead we beseech you again to tell us why you don't think the revolution that has taken place is helpful and what your views about the government of our city are.

SODERINI Come on, Bernardo, don't let your children down over such a serious matter, when you have always tried to satisfy them in matters that are less important!

BERNARDO I am happy to have this discussion with you – but as much to learn from you as to teach you, because what little I understand about these things I know only by experience, which none of you lack, having been involved for a considerable number of years now in affairs of state. Apart from this and your natural aptitude, you have the advantage of being well read. Thanks to this, you are able to learn from the dead what happened in many past eras, whereas I can only converse with the living and see nothing other than the events of my own time. So I tell you that, as you know, I have enjoyed a very long friendship with the Medici and I am infinitely indebted to that family. Not being of noble birth nor surrounded by relations, like you three, I have received favours from them and have been elevated and made equal to all those who would normally have preceded me in being awarded political offices and honours in the city.<sup>29</sup> Therefore if I were to say that the fall of Piero did not displease me,

<sup>29</sup> *onori*: see Glossary.

I would not be telling the truth; and if I had said so, I think I could be accused of being too ungrateful. But you know that I have been much more upset by the behaviour that caused this collapse. Foreseeing the outcome and believing it to be harmful not just to him and his friends but also – if I am not mistaken – to the city, I attempted to remedy the situation by giving advice, criticising him and getting angry with him. However, the disposition of the heavens and destiny were more potent than my counsel and that of a few others who always gave him good advice. So despite the love I have felt and feel for this family, if I believed – God be my witness – that this revolution was in any way useful to the city, I would have welcomed it as much as anyone else, because I was first a Florentine and indebted to my native city before I was a friend or obliged to the Medici. I know too that when Florence is in a bad way, neither the Medici, nor whoever else may be in charge, will fare other than badly, whereas Florence can certainly be great without the Medici. I don't want to provide other evidence of what I think about this, since I am talking to people who I'm sure know me well enough by now. In order not to protract our conversation more than is necessary, I initially want to convince you with only the weapons you use yourselves. Don't your philosophers – if Marsilio Ficino, with whom I have occasionally talked, has told me the truth – say that of the three types of government, of the one, the few and the many, the best of all is the government of the one, the next best that of the few, and the worst of all the government of the many?<sup>30</sup> So I don't know how you will justify yourselves with your books, since you reject the government they praise most and choose the one least praised by them.

CAPPONI It's up to the others who are well read to reply, since I have practically no learning apart from a bit of astrology picked up

<sup>30</sup> This definition derives from Aristotle, *The Politics*, III, 7, 1279a–1279b. Savonarola, following Aquinas, accepted government of the one as the best form except in Florence, where government of the many was preferable. *Trattato circa el reggimento e governo della città di Firenze*, bk. I, chs. 1–3, bk. II, ch. 1, Florence, 1498, ed. L. Firpo, Turin, 1963, tr. R. N. Watkins, 'Treatise on the Constitution and Government of the City of Florence', in *Humanism and Liberty: Writings on Freedom in Fifteenth-Century Florence*, Columbia, S.C., 1978, pp. 231–41. Cf. Ficino, 'In librum Platonis de regno' to Federigo of Urbino, *Opera*, Basel, 1561, repr. Turin, 1959, I, pp. 290–1; B. Scala, *Apologia contra vituperatores Florentiae*, Florence, 1496, fos. 26r–v.

man is better than any other government, because it is more united and less hindered from doing good; and the distinction Piero drew between one-man government, when it is natural and chosen by the election and desire of the subjects, and usurped government that is marked by violence, can also be grasped by idiots. For someone who rules lovingly and to the content of his subjects has – unless he is ignorant or evil by nature – no reason whatsoever to behave other than well. This is not the case with a ruler who controls his state by violent methods, because in order to preserve it and safeguard himself from people he is suspicious of, he is very often forced to do things he himself has no wish to do and dislikes doing – as I know was often the case with Cosimo. And I can myself testify that Lorenzo sometimes took decisions, in tears and despite himself, which could not have been more against his nature and against his generosity and greatness of spirit. So it is not the species of government in itself<sup>38</sup> that accounts for this diversity, by making either good or bad one that was naturally of another kind;<sup>39</sup> rather, it is because states<sup>40</sup> are very different and need to be ruled in different ways. What in effect I want to say is this: if it were possible to have an illegitimate regime<sup>41</sup> that was governed as agreeably and well as a loving regime, the fact of its being illegitimate would not alone make it worse than the other. For I believe that to know which type of government is better or less good, one should consider only its effects, and that an illegitimate government is usually judged bad because in the ordinary course of events it usually produces bad effects. What do you say to this?<sup>42</sup>

**CAPPONI** I think you are putting forward an impossible case, that something evil can be as good as something good.

**BERNARDO** I don't put it forward as a real situation, nor to discuss now if it could happen – but simply to open our discussion up and to have the chance of considering what things are really like by exam-

<sup>38</sup> *specie*; A and B: 'the way of holding it in itself'. Subsequently I usually translate *species* as *type*.

<sup>39</sup> I have added 'naturally' from B.

<sup>40</sup> *governii*: see Glossary under *governo*.

<sup>41</sup> lit. 'a usurped government', *uno governo usurpato*; A and B: *di . . . natura violento*. See Glossary, *ibid*.

<sup>42</sup> A continues in a cancelled passage: *Capponi*: 'I can't reply definitively until I understand better where your argument's going.' *Bernardo*: 'It's there I have a disadvantage in talking with a well-lettered lot like you, because I talk in broad terms and you proceed with the skills and advantages employed by these [professional] disputants.'

ining their roots and origins. However, if it really were like that, what would you say? Let me put it more clearly, so you can understand me better. If a legitimate ruler<sup>43</sup> through ignorance or malice produced the same evils as someone who had usurped power, I don't think we would say that the state acquired by violence was worse than the other one; but considering the effects of both to be equally malign and pernicious, we would criticise one as much as the other – isn't this true and indisputable?

CAPPONI Certainly. Indeed, instead of saying both were equally evil, we'd go further and say that the legitimate ruler, who behaved badly by his nature without any need, was worse than the other, who did what he perhaps otherwise wouldn't have done, had he not been forced to do so by the nature of his state.

BERNARDO Well said! And to finish what I wanted to say, in order not to base the verdict on Piero Guicciardini's classification<sup>44</sup> alone, I suggest that if we want to judge between different governments, we should consider not so much what type they are but their effects, calling better or less bad the government which has the better or less bad effects. For example, if someone who has usurped power rules better and to the greater benefit of his subjects than someone else who rules legitimately, wouldn't we say his city was better off and better governed? So in any general discussion about which state is better, an illegitimate or a legitimate one,<sup>45</sup> I would say every time and without any hesitation that the legitimate state is better, because it is natural and must be presumed to have no reason to behave other than well, while the other one almost always has to behave badly some time. But when we descend to details and existing governments and ask which is better, the government of this particular city, or that one, the one that was in Florence at the time of the Medici, or the one that was there before, then to give a firm answer I would look not so much at their type as their effects. I would consider where men are best governed, where laws are better observed, where there is better justice and where there is more respect for the good of all, distinguishing each person according to his rank.<sup>46</sup> I don't know what

<sup>43</sup> *uno principe naturale.*

<sup>44</sup> *la distinzione.*

<sup>45</sup> C: *uno violento o uno volontario*; B: *violento o uno naturale.*

<sup>46</sup> *grado*: see Glossary.

your philosophers have to say about this, but this is what I naturally understand and what seems to me to be quite clear.

SODERINI We agree, and if the philosophers were asked, I don't think they would reply any differently.

CAPPONI That's true.

BERNARDO Let's then proceed further. What we want to discuss is whether the revolution has benefited the city or not. According to the premise<sup>47</sup> I have put forward, to resolve the question satisfactorily we must consider the effects of the government that was overthrown and its situation, and, on the other hand, what will be the effects and situation of the government you have introduced – or to put it better, perhaps, you think of introducing. For seeing that the road we now seem to be making for is different from the one indicated at the beginning by your *parlamento*,<sup>48</sup> I don't know what to baptise it. Tell me what government it's going to be,<sup>49</sup> so that when we have considered its nature, and the nature of the city and the people, we can imagine what effects it will produce. Placing these on one hand and on the other the effects of the other government – and we all know what they were like – we shall be able to make our judgement.

GUICCIARDINI This will be difficult, since it will be like judging between something which is certain and something uncertain, where it will be easy to make a lot of mistakes.

BERNARDO It's true we can't judge as decisively as we could if both were equally in existence, but I don't think we shall be as far off the mark as you think. Because of my long life and my frequent experience of domestic upheavals in the city, as well as what I have often heard old men with great experience in public affairs,<sup>50</sup> especially Cosimo, Neri di Gino and others, saying about the past, I know

<sup>47</sup> *fondamento*.

<sup>48</sup> He refers to the *parlamento*, or citizen plebiscite, held on 2 December 1494, after the departure of Charles VIII of France and before the more radical reform of the government on 23 December. It appointed twenty *accoppiatori* from leading families to select the magistrates until a new electoral scrutiny could be held (they included Capponi but not Soderini or Guicciardini); see *History of Florence*, ch.12.

<sup>49</sup> A: 'indeed, to put it better, what they will be, because this state is in the process of being born, I don't know what name it has to have until I see it born and baptised. So you, Piero Capponi and Pagolantonio, who are among those who are considering the models and must have planned what you want to do, tell me . . .' (but Soderini was not one of the Twenty; see above).

<sup>50</sup> *uomini antichi e savi . . . dello stato*.

by now so much about the nature of the people and the citizens, and generally about the whole city, that I think I can imagine at quite close hand the possible effects of each form of political life. And in view of my great age and constant involvement in domestic – almost never in foreign – affairs, I wouldn't want to be thought arrogant if I make some claim to understanding them. What this amounts to is my belief that, although I could be wrong over many details, in general matters and in everything of substance I hope I'm not mistaken. And where I am, you can easily make up for me. For having read so many histories of various nations in ancient and modern times, I am certain you have also thought about them and gained a familiarity with them,<sup>51</sup> so that it won't be difficult for you to judge what the future will be. For the world is so constituted that everything which exists at present has existed before, under different names, in different times and different places. Thus everything that has existed in the past is partly in existence now and partly will exist at other times, returning into being every day, but in different disguises and in different colours, so that without a very good eye one takes it for new and fails to recognise it. But someone with a sharp eye,<sup>52</sup> who knows how to compare and contrast one event with another and consider what the substantial differences are and which matter less, easily recognises it and with calculations and measurements of past events knows how to calculate and measure quite a lot of the future. So there's no doubt that proceeding all together in this way, we shall err very little in our discussions and we shall be able to predict much of what is going to happen in this new political system. So let me ask again, what are you going to call it?

**SODERINI** Before replying to this, I must tell you that I'm afraid there may be a fallacy in our argument, for I'm not sure whether your premise of judging which type of government is better on the basis of its effects will hold in our case, where on one hand we are judging the Medici regime, which was a one-man government and usurped, and on the other a free republican regime. If free government is good elsewhere, in our city, where it is natural and based on what people universally want, it is the best, since in Florence liberty is no less engraved in men's hearts than it is written on our walls

<sup>51</sup> *fattovene uno abito*.

<sup>52</sup> B: 'someone who is not very wise . . . but someone with judgement'. Cf. *Ricordo C* 76, ed. Spongano, p. 87, tr. Domandi, pp. 60–1.



and banners.<sup>53</sup> So although I think political writers<sup>54</sup> usually classify constitutions according to three types, of the one, of the few and of the many, they don't deny that the best for any city is the one that is natural to it. Therefore when the terms are so disproportionate, I don't see how we can proceed according to your rule. How can we ever deny that a free government, which in Florence, as everyone knows, is the most natural government, is better than any other type that can possibly be introduced?

**BERNARDO** I don't see, Pagolantonio, why our premise has to be changed for this reason, since talking in general terms you will admit that a free or open government<sup>55</sup> is not necessarily better than the others. Your philosophers, or as you called them just now political writers, provide abundant evidence of this in normally preferring the government of one man, when he is good, to political liberty in a city.<sup>56</sup> And with good reason, because the objective of the person who introduced these free republics<sup>57</sup> was not to allow everyone to meddle in government but to safeguard the laws and the common good, which is achieved better under one man, when he governs well, than by other types of government. Nor is this contradicted by the argument on which you have firmly based yourself, that liberty is natural in Florence. A philosopher and anyone of judgement will reply to the question put in general terms that the best government for any city is the one that is natural to it. For being better adapted to the brains and appetites of its inhabitants, one hopes that it will see an end to the problems that normally obstruct a regime involving violence and that it will flourish better and be more fruitful than any other type – just as in cultivating your garden, you would be well advised to introduce plants that suit the soil, since normally they do better. But coming to individual cases, if one saw a free regime that for some special reason didn't produce good effects despite being natural to the city, then neither your philosophers nor anyone else, if he were wise, would prefer it to another type of regime. Quite the

<sup>53</sup> Here referring to the insignia of the Signoria with 'Libertas' inscribed on its shield, as on the facade of the communal palace, illustrated in G. A. Brucker, *Florence, 1138–1737*, London, 1984, p. 138. See N. Rubinstein, 'Florentina Libertas', *Rinascimento*, 2nd ser. 26 (1986), pp. 22–3.

<sup>54</sup> *politici*.

<sup>55</sup> *uno governo di libertà*.

<sup>56</sup> *la libertà di una città*.

<sup>57</sup> *le libertà*, cf. Appendix, Maxim 109.

contrary, they would extol every other type that brought with it greater benefits. So we must return to my initial premise, which – unless I am mistaken – is so obvious that it's unnecessary to waste more time on it. Tell me, then, for the third time, what kind of government yours will be.

CAPPONI<sup>58</sup> Our intention was to remove the city from the power of one man and restore liberty, as has been done. It is true that we wanted to avoid giving the government absolutely to the people, but rather to place it in the hands of the leading and worthiest citizens, to make it a government of men of worth rather than a totally popular regime. We did not, however, want to restrict it to so few that it would not be free, nor to slacken the bridle so much that it came into the hands of the masses, with no distinction made between one person and another. With the election of the twenty men in charge of conducting the scrutiny and the other measures introduced by the plebiscite, this was the road we were moving towards. Then up jumped this friar<sup>59</sup> and raised such a clamour for a popular government and a Great Council on the Venetian model that, owing to its inherent appeal to majority taste and to the credit he enjoys, he has been responsible for modifying the decrees of our *parlamento*, so that nothing now remains of them but the authority we scrutineers enjoy to appoint the Signoria until the end of this year – and even this is so disliked by the people that God knows if we shan't have to renounce it before then. So in effect the regime is much more popular than we initially intended. Nevertheless the city will be free, which was our main intention, and although the government may be totally popular, the leading citizens of worth will necessarily be esteemed more than the others. As good customs develop and opportunities arise, it will gradually become possible to refine things and bring them back more or less to our original design;<sup>60</sup> burdens, as our proverb has it, settle down while travelling.

BERNARDO I think you are greatly indebted to this friar. Thanks to his raising the alarm in good time, he has prevented you from experiencing the necessary outcome of your form of government; for I've no doubt that it would have encouraged civil unrest that would soon have resulted in disorder and tumultuous change. It would per-

<sup>58</sup> A adds 'I will reply quickly and openly, as is my wont.'

<sup>59</sup> Girolamo Savonarola: see Biographical Notes.

<sup>60</sup> 'refine . . . design'; A 'restrict . . . model'.

haps be prudent to complete what remains to be done while it seems you can take the initiative and enjoy some position for yourselves, rather than wait until you are forced to act. For to have a Great Council in Florence, and on the other hand to have twenty citizens with authority to appoint the Signoria, are contradictions in terms. Since one must necessarily yield to the other, it doesn't require much effort to see that it will be the larger number that swallows up the smaller. To speak frankly about this, if one could establish a regime in which the city really enjoyed political freedom, and in which the leading citizens, that is the wisest and best men, enjoyed more rank and status than the others, and in which important affairs didn't have to be discussed and arbitrarily decided on by the ignorant, this is what I would call the best government. I think this is what you planned and what the election of the twenty and the other decrees of your plebiscite went some way towards realising, although in many respects it was your intention that deserved praise, rather than your success in finding ways to implement it.<sup>61</sup> But I am of the firm opinion, and experience will always show it to be the case, that in Florence power must necessarily either be held by one man alone or pass totally into the hands of the people. Every middle course will create great confusion and daily outbreaks of violence. This is what experience has taught me in the past, for every time power has been held by a few citizens, the city has always been full of discord, with revolutions and plebiscites every day.<sup>62</sup> There have been extremely few great citizens in these types of regimes who have not been decapitated or exiled; when after a brief time power has finally slipped from the grasp of the few, it is either restricted to one man alone or it returns to the people at large. Examples of this are so frequent and so well known that I don't want to waste time reciting them, but the reasons for it are no less familiar.

In Florence men naturally love equality and are therefore very unwilling to accept and recognise others as their superiors. We are by temperament full of strong passions and restlessness, and it is this which is the cause of discord and disunity among the ruling elite. Through their desire to dominate each other, they pull this person here and that one there, so that due to their own shortcomings they

<sup>61</sup> *la intentione vostra più che la invenzione*, amplifying from B: *e modi che voi averi trovati*, 'the means you have found'.

<sup>62</sup> Cf. Appendix, Maxim 212.

lose even more power. The fact that others dislike anyone being superior to themselves ensures that whenever this happens, these men are destroyed<sup>63</sup> – for, as everyone in Florence who does not belong to the inner circle resents the dominance of others, it is impossible to remain great without a foundation and a supporting shoulder. And if the rulers are not in agreement, who is there who can provide this shoulder and this foundation?<sup>64</sup> So I don't think I'm deceiving myself when I conclude that, although the regime you introduced through the plebiscite had good objectives, nonetheless it would never have lasted, because you would have been unable to remain in agreement, and before very long it would inevitably have been overthrown with changes and damage to you all. It would have changed in one of two ways. It would either have created a more widely-based and more licentious popular government than this friar's government will be at present, for it would have come about with an outburst of violence and rioting. Or it would have opened the way for the return of Piero de' Medici with disorders and the use of force; because there is no one among you who is so well set up and so well rooted in the city – and you would be mad to deceive yourselves about this – that he could count on acquiring enough authority to make himself sole ruler and superior to everyone else. I don't deny that if the situation got out of control, it might be possible for someone<sup>65</sup> to seize power; but apart from being difficult, such a thing would have a weak foundation and be incapable of lasting or establishing a regime. To achieve this, prudence, wealth and reputation must be combined in one and the same person, which very rarely happens; and even when so many qualities are combined in one man, they still need to be helped by the passage of time and by innumerable favourable opportunities. It is practically impossible for so many things and chances to concur in the same person; and for this reason, ultimately, there was never more than one Cosimo in Florence. So it is thanks to the friar that what would soon have happened without him is happening now, much better and with less disorder. We must, then, talk now about popular government. To return to our original

<sup>63</sup> *vanno in terra*; B: 'with their legs in the air' = dead.

<sup>64</sup> This passage recalls Machiavelli's *Prince*, ch. 18: in the world the crowd counts for more than the few, for 'the few have no place when the many have somewhere to lean themselves' (*appoggiarsi*).

<sup>65</sup> A: Piero de' Medici.

plan, we must consider on one hand what was good and bad about the Medici government and its achievements, and, on the other, what will be the effect in Florence of a popular government – since the friar removes the bother of having to talk about the government of the few or, as you others call it, of the *ottimati*. But before we go on, I'd like to know what you think about this.

**CAPPONI** In the days of Messer Maso degli Albizi, Gino my great-grandfather, Niccolò da Uzzano and those others, the government was in the hands of the leading citizens of most worth, but it was not so narrow that the city wasn't free. The regime remained united for many years and governed in Florence and outside with the highest repute. For they avoided revolutions and not only defended themselves from the very powerful enemies who attempted to oppress us at that time, but they also acquired Pisa and many other places and considerably increased the dominion and the reputation of the city.<sup>66</sup> For this reason, in the opinion of everyone who has talked or written about these matters, Florence has never had a regime that governed her better or was more honoured than this one. Therefore we shouldn't despair that what existed then might not return another time, especially since we were all set – and had already begun – to get as close as possible to that form of government. None of us deluded ourselves by claiming to be superior to the others; and our fear of falling into one of the two extremes, a widely-based popular government or the return of Piero, our common enemy, would of necessity have kept us united and bound to each other.

**BERNARDO** I am one of those who would never argue from experience in such matters unless I saw it accompanied by reason, which in this case seems evident to me, as I've said. For although none of you has yet laid claim to that first place, nevertheless there would have been more than four of you who would always have gone around thinking about how to increase your authority every day. This and many other unforeseen events give rise to the unending competition and ambition that generate disunion – and this is rarely restrained by the fears you have spoken of, because men are blinded by hatred, anger and cupidity. Rulers aren't all wise; on the contrary, so few are wise that it would be amazing had you all been so critical of Piero

<sup>66</sup> Pisa was acquired in 1406, Arezzo in 1384, Cortona in 1411 and Livorno in 1421, mostly through large payments.

do. They wanted to be in control of the government, but in as civilised<sup>71</sup> a way as possible, using humanity and modesty. I think that this was mainly because it was in their nature to behave like this, since it cannot be denied they were well bred and of a very generous<sup>72</sup> disposition. And since Cosimo and Lorenzo were also prudent and were always surrounded by a number of wise citizens and counsellors, they knew that the nature of their regime and the condition of the city were such that they could scarcely afford to behave differently; and that if they had ever attempted to resort to blood and violence, as happened in Perugia and Bologna,<sup>73</sup> it would in Florence have destroyed their greatness more than it increased it. This is what I wanted to say in general. Now I am waiting to hear from you what your more specific criticisms of the Medici regime are.

CAPPONI It will be more difficult for me to describe its evils than it was for you to say what was good about it – not because the evils are less well known, but because they so exceed the good things that my memory will fail to remember them all. However, Pagolantonio will make good my omissions.

I think that in a government of a city like ours there are three main topics to be considered: how to administer justice fairly, how best to distribute the honorary political offices and the salaried public offices, and how to conduct foreign affairs, that is, concerning the defence and expansion of our dominion.

As to justice, I don't want to accuse the Medici of being greedy to exercise influence in the sphere of civil justice,<sup>74</sup> for except where constrained by some particular interest, they have in fact proceeded with due respect. It is undeniable, however, that they have sometimes sullied it by recommending their friends to the magistrates or to the judges; and what they have failed to do has often been done without their knowledge by their ministers or favourites, whose recommendations, because they had the warm support of the regime, carried a lot of weight. The fact that the recommendations were made without the Medici's agreement is irrelevant: it is enough that, because they stemmed from their greatness, they are defects produced by the

<sup>71</sup> *con quanta più civiltà è stato possibile*: see Glossary.

<sup>72</sup> i.e. noble, which is interchangeable with *generoso* in A and B.

<sup>73</sup> Perugia fell into the control of the Baglioni family in 1488 and Bologna was controlled by the Bentivoglio family from 1443 to 1506.

<sup>74</sup> *appetitosi nella civile*.

authority of tyrants, whose wishes are held in such respect that even when they are silent, men try to divine what their wishes are. Nor is it only the person who is in control of the regime<sup>75</sup> they think of satisfying, but also all those they believe have a part in it or enjoy favour. And what do we imagine was the effect of Lorenzo's very close involvement in the scrutinies of the Mercanzia?<sup>76</sup> It was not only useful, when he perhaps wanted to help some friend; but filling the election bags with the names of his dependants, who demonstrated their gratitude in the cases in which they were involved, ensured that, with no other help from the state, preferential treatment was given to the lawsuits of members of the inner circle. This could not have displeased Lorenzo, since he must have loved the fact that his friends' affairs received so much better treatment than anyone else's that everyone desired to be classified as his friend. And I think it was for the same reason of being able secretly to favour his friends' affairs that he always kept a hand-picked chancellor in the Mercanzia, as well as in all the guilds and the offices.<sup>77</sup> And why do you think that the judges of the Six and of the Court of Appeal, who in the past were held in such high repute throughout the world, no longer enjoy any credit? Since our citizens today are no less knowledgeable about trading than in the olden days and, I think, are no more corruptible now than they used to be, this can only be due to the suspicion of favouritism.

But what shall we say about criminal justice, where without any doubt favours were dispensed more generously? I will not deny that in the normal course of events Lorenzo did indeed desire the city and the countryside to be tranquil, he wanted no one to be oppressed, the laws observed and life conducted without outrages. But when crimes were committed, he had to ensure special treatment for his own friends and see that eyes were closed when their affairs were dealt with, or else that they got off very lightly. And these friends of his were so numerous that each year infinite numbers of cases arose

<sup>75</sup> A: 'and anyone who has no direct influence with them tries to have as an intermediary those who do have influence with members of . . .'

<sup>76</sup> The mercantile court exercised summary justice administered by an outside Official and six elected Florentine citizens; see G. Bonolis, *La giurisdizione della mercanzia in Firenze nel secolo XIV*, Florence, 1901, and now A. Astorri, 'Note sulla Mercanzia', pp. 984 ff.

<sup>77</sup> A: 'and you know that here and in every guild he wanted chancellors that suited him for the same reason', Astorri, *ibid.*, pp. 972-3, 977-9.

that were settled in this way. You know how many chiefs<sup>78</sup> and family relationships they supported in the countryside to use in case of need, that is, to have the forces to keep the citizens smothered. It was necessary to treat all of them with consideration, as well as the relations, friends and supporters of these men. The same was true of Florence, and this is the reason not only why the law often proceeded gently against stabbings and other forms of violence, but also why our citizens and these little tyrants from outside were allowed to make off with the possessions of their neighbours, hospitals, local communities and the Church. You all remember this without my needing to mention any names, as well as how many outrages of this sort were committed each year without coming to light, because the victims remained silent, fearing that litigation against these powerful men would be more likely to result in new damage than in reparation. What anger, even desperation, shall we not believe was generated in these other people's minds, when they saw that what for them was a mortal sin was treated in another sort of man as merely venial, one treated as the son of his country, the other as a bastard? And how inhuman and tyrannical was the expression – which had already become a sort of proverb – with which these men used to unburden or, to put it better, deceive their consciences: 'in matters to do with the state, one must judge one's enemies harshly and one's friends with favour'! As if justice can allow such distinctions – as though she can be painted with two different sets of scales, one in which to weigh the affairs of one's enemies, the other those of one's friends! I don't want to overload this topic, since it is weighty enough in itself; so without saying any more, let us move on to the second, which concerns the distribution of the honorary political offices and the salaried public offices.

It goes without saying how important the distribution of these honorary and salaried offices is in any city – and especially in Florence, where, since the citizens pay such heavy taxes to support the republic, it is only fair they should benefit from the emoluments which belong to the republic. All the more so because, as a state that has almost always enjoyed freedom as our natural condition, we do not experience what commonly happens under a prince, for these things, that is, these honorary and salaried offices, belong to us all and are in

<sup>78</sup> *capi*.



common.<sup>79</sup> Everyone knows how they were distributed by the Medici family. Their principal objective was never to give them to people who deserved them because of the standing of their family, or for their abilities or other merits. Instead, they made them circulate among those they regarded as their friends and confidants, often satisfying even the most frivolous appetites. We all know that not only wives, pet-favourites and lowly domestic servants held sway over them, but even lovers were satisfied. And what is more important and less tolerable in a republic, a large part of the citizen body has been excluded almost by law – that's to say, those families they never wanted to trust, whose sons and descendants from 1434 onwards have been totally deprived of office, like the product of tainted stock. This has resulted in a double wrong. Not only have they taken from those to whom it should have been given; but in place of these,<sup>80</sup> they have given to those to whom it should not have been given,<sup>81</sup> elevating to the highest honours many ignoble families and making infinite numbers of plebeians and peasants eligible for political office. As Puccio<sup>82</sup> said tyrannically: strive to fill the place of the nobles by dressing the plebs in the scarlet cloth of San Martino.<sup>83</sup>

Under this heading should be included their dishonesty over taxes, since the citizens who were deprived of office were also burdened with heavier tax assessments. Everyone knows how much of the nobility, how much wealth was destroyed by Cosimo, and subsequently by means of taxes. This was the reason why the Medici family never allowed a fixed system to be worked out that would impose taxes almost by law, for they always wanted to reserve for themselves the power of beating whomever they wanted arbitrarily.<sup>84</sup> Certainly, if they had wanted to keep this stick in hand for use only against their

<sup>79</sup> A adds, 'therefore anyone who is denied them is wronged and is deprived of what belongs to him'.

<sup>80</sup> B: 'failing these', A: 'to fill the place of these'.

<sup>81</sup> Paraphrasing Matthew, 13:12; Luke, 19:26.

<sup>82</sup> Puccio di Antonio Pucci: see Biographical Notes.

<sup>83</sup> *gente vile . . . panni di grana*; A: 'by dressing louts . . . they have made, or rather wanted to make, them nobles'. Cf. the saying 'two yards of pink cloth made a citizen of worth', attributed to Cosimo de' Medici by Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, bk. vii, ch. 6 ('Due canne di panno rosato facevano un uomo da bene').

<sup>84</sup> *Arbitrio* was the name for forced loans or arbitrary taxation, in contrast to the rational and open tax assessment *a lume*, the *catasto*, which was based on individual declarations according to criteria laid down by law.

enemies and those they distrusted, employing it solely to protect themselves, it would have been somewhat more excusable. But they clearly used it to sow terror among people of every kind. Unable to whet an appetite for office in peaceable and unambitious citizens, who were more interested in trade than power, they used this other instrument<sup>85</sup> to make themselves adored and to become through this means bosses of everything and everyone, forcing men to try to divine how to obey them even in the smallest matters. It upsets me too much simply to remember all this, let alone talk about it any more, so I suggest we move on to the third topic I proposed, that is, the aspect of government concerned with defending and expanding our territory.

Here I say that the Medici have always had as their ultimate objective their own personal welfare. Directing all means to this end, decisions about whether to embark on enterprises or renounce them, whether to make or preserve friendships, were made not with the benefit of the city in mind but according to what they thought would be most conducive to their own personal greatness; and if ever the two concurred, that is, the public good and their own particular interest, they managed to see to it not only that they kept control of everything, but that all the honour and all the merit was theirs alone, thus ensuring that everyone knew they were absolutely in command.<sup>86</sup> The extremely costly and dangerous war against Volterra was brought about by Lorenzo, whose personal animosities forced the Volterreans to rebel.<sup>87</sup> His desire to retain the personal support of the Sforza family and his alienation of Sixtus and Count Girolamo for his own private concerns so exasperated the Pope and King Ferrante, that they attempted to introduce change by means of the Pazzi Conspiracy.<sup>88</sup> Failing to ruin Lorenzo by this means, they began the war, which involved us in huge expenditure and severely damaged our countryside.<sup>89</sup> To help the same king in the Barons' War we spent a

<sup>85</sup> B adds 'to satisfy their ambition'; A: 'medicine to satisfy their pride'.

<sup>86</sup> *padroni assoluti*.

<sup>87</sup> Guicciardini, *History of Florence*, pp. 25–6; E. Fiumi, *L'impresa di Lorenzo de' Medici contro Volterra (1472)*, Florence, 1948.

<sup>88</sup> Pope Sixtus IV and his nephew Count Girolamo Riario. On the Pazzi Conspiracy in April 1478 and the war from June 1478 to March 1480, see Guicciardini, *History of Florence*, pp. 29–51, Lorenzo de' Medici, *Lettere*, vols. III and IV, ed. N. Rubinstein, Florence, 1977, 1981.

<sup>89</sup> A: 'our citizens and the countryside'.

vast sum of money quite unnecessarily, since his difficulties were not inopportune to us; but Lorenzo was unwilling to tolerate this because of the special relationship he had formed with Ferrante. The same reason, as well as his closeness to the Orsini, made Piero unwilling to loosen the knots with which he seemed to have bound his regime together so effectively, and so he committed the folly of opposing the King of France – throwing the city into such a crisis. I don't want to lament this, since through it we gained our liberty, but all the same it involved too great a risk of totally destroying us all. It was a wise decision to defend Ferrara in order to prevent the Venetians becoming too powerful; but in order to claim all the credit and merit for himself, Lorenzo wanted to go in person to the Diet at Cremona. Nor do I criticise the campaign against Pietrasanta on account of the situation in Lucca;<sup>90</sup> but when it was on the verge of surrendering because of the pressure applied by our army, Lorenzo went in person, so he alone could enjoy the honour won by other people's hard work. He did the same at Sarzana, where an intolerable amount of money was spent on acquiring and then fortifying it to no purpose – although this I attribute not to his own private interest but rather to lack of judgement.<sup>91</sup> The conclusion, in short, is that the city and private individuals have many times faced huge expenses and dangers simply to satisfy the Medici's personal interests. While the damage suffered from every enterprise has been borne equally by all the citizens, the honour and merit have been appropriated by the Medici for themselves.

All these evils have a single root, since whoever is head of a narrow regime has as his objective only his own personal greatness and he always does what seems to him best to preserve it, with no respect for God, for his country and for mankind. Because our military forces depended on the Medici,<sup>92</sup> we don't know how often they have made us engage mercenary soldiers unnecessarily, having employed as cap-

<sup>90</sup> In his *History of Florence* (p. 59), Guicciardini explains that Pietrasanta would be very useful 'in the case of a campaign against Lucca'. See note 91 below.

<sup>91</sup> The fortresses at Pietrasanta and Sarzana, lost during the Pazzi War, were reacquired in 1484 and 1487. See Guicciardini, *ibid.*, pp. 62, 67 and in general on the wars in this period, pp. 52–68; also H. Butters, 'Florence, Milan and the Barons' War (1485–86)', in *Lorenzo de' Medici Studi*, ed. G. C. Garfagnini, Florence, 1992, pp. 281–308; and C. Shaw's articles on Lorenzo and the Orsini, *ibid.*, pp. 257–79, and in *Florence and Italy: Essays Presented to Nicolai Rubinstein*, London, 1988, pp. 33–42.

<sup>92</sup> B: 'because the arms were in their hands'.

tains men who, though inadequate, were their friends and confidants. In order to sustain these excessive expenses and keep his friends in the courts and circles of princes, didn't Lorenzo, who as a trader had practically gone bankrupt,<sup>93</sup> lay his hands on communal funds and help himself, by covert means, to large sums of money? Didn't he know what was happening in his bank when the soldiers' payments during the war of 1478 and 1479 were paid into it? What he did for himself, he wouldn't or couldn't deny to his friends, many of whom helped themselves to communal monies drawn from the blood and bones of the poor citizens – indeed, even from the dowries of unfortunate young girls. Suspicion inevitably follows in the wake of such behaviour. For knowing that these conditions can only please someone who is corrupt or despicable himself, or who is extraordinarily self-interested, they are suspicious of everyone else. So they are forced to read everyone's hands and keep down everyone who seems to them great or too intelligent.<sup>94</sup> This was the reason why the Pazzi were deprived of the Borromei inheritance by an iniquitous law<sup>95</sup> and were battered from so many sides that desperation drove them into the conspiracy, with its many dire consequences. This was why no marriages were allowed to be contracted between people who seemed to him to bring together too much distinction. This, too, was why so many people were obstructed and kept back by a variety of techniques. I won't speak of my own bankruptcy, for as it had no consequences, I always remembered Lorenzo's kindness to me, in appearing to offer help, more than the damage done by putting me at risk; but one knows that the only reason for it was to break my spirit and perhaps with my example that of many others. There is no need to be surprised by the other things, when I recall how distrustful he was of his closest friends, outwitting them in various ways and always retaining a certain reserve towards them. Good evidence of this is his subtle device of employing secretaries, by order of the Eight on Foreign Affairs, to reside permanently with our ambassadors, despite the fact that the ambassadors were in any case always among his closest friends.<sup>96</sup>

<sup>93</sup> B: 'was ruined.'

<sup>94</sup> It is clear from his *History of Florence* that Guicciardini is especially referring to Lorenzo, whose 'gravest and most troublesome fault was his suspiciousness' (p. 74).

<sup>95</sup> On 20 March 1477, which prevented women inheriting *ab intestato*, ASF Statuti 29, fos. 416v–418v.

<sup>96</sup> Guicciardini enlarges on these criticisms in his portrait of Lorenzo in the *History of Florence*, pp. 71–76. On this reform, introduced in 1487–88, see Brown, *Bartolomeo*

From this evidence one can infer that had it become useful to the Medici to dispense with the mildness with which you have said they lived – and it is true, compared with the tyrants of Bologna and Perugia – they would have done so. For anyone who proposes as his ultimate objective his own greatness<sup>97</sup> regards as an enemy everything opposed to it, and to preserve it he would whenever necessary utterly destroy the riches, the honour and the lives of others. What better example of this is there than what happened in 1434, when Cosimo exiled and destroyed so much of the nobility and so many families, that of all the evils ever suffered by our city, it can truly be said that nothing was comparable to this? The wrong done to Lorenzo by the Pazzi was very serious – perhaps it would be more accurate to say offence, since one cannot call someone wronged who provoked it. Nevertheless, his vendetta exceeded the bounds of civilised behaviour. Not only were many blameless people hanged in the first outburst, but shortly afterwards<sup>98</sup> the same was done to Renato Pazzi, a man who had always detested arms. Then in cold blood those poor innocent young boys were held for many years in prison, the young girls were forbidden to marry, and many other grossly excessive things were done that are typical of such states, in which not only are the conspirators punished but also their sons, brothers and relatives. I could go on indefinitely, but I have said enough and want to let Pagolantonio take over.

SODERINI Piero has raised all the most important points and I think enough has been said, especially since it would take too long to narrate all the evils of that time, which are indeed limitless. Bernardo rightly said that Cosimo's and Lorenzo's behaviour was mild compared with that of other tyrants, either because this was their nature, or because they were wise and had good counsellors. But this is exactly why I hate such governments all the more. For if we have to tolerate so many evils under a tyrant who is benign and wise, what can we expect from one who is imprudent or malign? What could we expect from Piero? For apart from having been endowed with no greater prudence than you are aware of, he didn't even have the good nature and sweet blood of his father and grand-

Scala, 1429–1497, *Chancellor of Florence*, Princeton, 1979 (rev. ed. in Italian, Florence, 1990), pp. 188–9.

<sup>97</sup> A: 'good'.

<sup>98</sup> A: 'the following day'. Cf. Guicciardini's account of Lorenzo's cruelty in his *Memorie di famiglia*, Bari, 1936, p. 42.

father, and which our nation usually enjoys. Since his mother was a foreigner, it is not surprising that his Florentine blood was debased and that he degenerated into foreign ways of behaving, which were too insolent and haughty for us.<sup>99</sup> What then could have been expected from Piero's sons who are Orsinis on both sides? But what can I say? Even if Piero had been like his father,<sup>100</sup> things would always, inevitably, have deteriorated, because it is the nature of narrow regimes to become increasingly restrictive: the power of the tyrant always increases and so consequently do all the evils that derive from his dominance. Consider Cosimo's progress and how much more powerful he was at the end of his life than he had been at the beginning of 1434. Subsequently Lorenzo enjoyed more absolute power than Cosimo and in his last years everything was much more tightly controlled by him, and was becoming daily more restricted than it had been in the early days after his father's death. We would have seen the same happening with Piero – indeed, we already saw it, since he had put everything into the hands of Ser Piero da Bibbiena and removed to his household chancery all the business that in Lorenzo's day was usually dealt with by the Otto di Pratica. The reason for this was, as Piero Capponi has said, the distrust felt by rulers of narrow regimes even towards their friends. Although they like participating in the government, it is nevertheless impossible for such friends not to become secretly angry – even if they should completely lack the spirit of a good citizen (which is difficult to believe of anyone whose mind is not totally corrupt), even if, I say, they should lack so much as a spark of love towards their native city – when they see they are held in suspicion and that the authority and weight of government rests with secretaries, men of low birth and little quality, mostly subjects<sup>101</sup> from our dominion, to whom nevertheless they must defer and whom they must honour as leading citizens if they want to survive. Apart from it being extremely unpleasant for a person of any taste to be dominated by those who should be their servants, it is also pernicious for the country to find itself in the hands of people

<sup>99</sup> In A this speech is put into the mouth of Capponi, who in addition refers to Piero's temerity, insolence and cruelty, concluding that they can scarcely be blamed for having escaped from this yoke to achieve what they hope will be a very different type of regime.

<sup>100</sup> A: 'if Piero had been well-qualified'

<sup>101</sup> *sudditi*: see Glossary.

who are our enemies or at least don't love us, and for all our secrets and private affairs, as well as the health and wealth of the city,<sup>102</sup> to have to pass every day through the hands of such people and be better known to them than to ourselves.

Therefore I don't know how Bernardo can compare the way of life in such regimes with popular government. Although the results of popular government might not be better than those of tyranny, one is based on the natural appetite of all men who by nature relish liberty, the other the direct opposite, since everyone has a horror of slavery. So even if it has disadvantages, one should prefer what satisfies one's nature better, to its opposite. Because everyone normally has these natural instincts, this argument applies equally to everyone. But it is especially those who are more gifted or who are more noble in mind<sup>103</sup> who cannot – and should not – tolerate servitude. On the contrary, they can only despair when they see that their actions, which ought to be free and not contingent on anyone apart from themselves and the good of the country, must instead be regulated by the arbitrary will of others, whether justly or at their pleasure. They must despair when they realise that they not only must submit to someone who knows many times less than themselves, but also have to go around concealing their virtue because of the tyrant's dislike of all elevated spirits, every outstanding power – especially when based on innate virtue, being then all the harder to vanquish. The tyrant nevertheless does this, sometimes through envy, because he alone wants to be outstanding, and often through fear, which he is normally always full of. I don't want to apply these words to anyone in particular, but you all know that I am not speaking to no purpose.

So if the primary objective of legitimate rulers of cities, and the main task of philosophers and all who have written about political life, has been to set things up in such a way that the city will produce virtues, excellence of character and generous deeds, how must we condemn and detest a government that, on the contrary, does all it can to extinguish every act of generosity and all virtue! I am talking about civic virtues which make men capable of performing great deeds, that is, those which benefit the republic. How miserable it is for noble minds and for men who desire fame to see all means of

<sup>102</sup> *umori e valuta.*

<sup>103</sup> *di animo più generoso.*

home very peaceably, in freedom and under the rule of law. I'm sure there are other topics we could talk about, but I think enough has been said – and also it would be good to have Piero Guicciardini add what we have left out.

**GUICCIARDINI** You have said so much, I'm delighted to say, that I am loath to attempt to say more. So much so, that it will be impossible for Bernardo to reply<sup>110</sup> or for you to respond to him without elucidating lots of interesting points about the government of a city, which is just what I wanted. Since we are on the way to achieving my objective, now is not the moment for me to interrupt to no purpose.

**BERNARDO** Your account of the defects of that regime was so clearly organised and so well remembered that you have quite evidently thought about it more than once. I don't want to deny it or to moderate it more than is necessary, since we are arguing to discover the truth, not for argument's sake. But I'm confident I shall succeed in showing you that this government of yours – from which you expect a golden age – will share many of the same defects and will also have others. So finely balancing them both, you will perhaps find things are rather different from what you imagine. Pagolantonio always wants to cut off my line of approach with the name of liberty and by showing how naturally men crave for it, especially in our city, and on the contrary how detestable servitude is. And so he concludes that a free regime, despite bringing with it worse conditions, should be loved more than a government in the hands of one person – especially by intelligent and generous-minded men who aspire to glory and who are deprived of every chance of being virtuous and acquiring fame under one-man rule, where, indeed, they lie under suspicion and need to try to conceal their virtuous qualities. Before proceeding, it seems necessary to say something about this, since if we let ourselves be led astray by this fallacy, the whole foundation of my argument will be shaken.

I have often pondered on the fact that this word 'liberty' is frequently used more as a disguise and an excuse by those who want to conceal their cupidity and ambition than because men in fact have a natural desire for it. I'm talking of the liberty we think about in governing a city, not the liberty that concerns individuals,<sup>111</sup> that is,

<sup>110</sup> A: 'to resolve'.

<sup>111</sup> *lo stato delle persone*; B: *la sostanzialità delle p.*; A: *le persone*.



begin to seek, or at least desire, greatness and preferment over others. Where they first procured liberty, they begin, if they have the chance, to procure servitude, seeking either to make themselves leaders of the state, or to make someone else head – in the hope of gaining more by adhering to him than they would from equality. This demonstrates what men's objective really is, since the powerful often use the name of liberty to deceive the rest, and many who have sought for it abandon it as soon as they achieve equality, if they think they are entitled to hope for a superior status.

If you were to tell me that history contains many examples of people fired by the desire for the freedom of their country as their ultimate objective, and so ardently that they have risked their own lives for it, I beg you not to delude yourselves. And if I attempt to make you see how things really are, please don't for this reason label me a lover of tyranny and enemy of freedom and republics – especially since before our discussion is over, I hope that it will be clear that I'm not at all against freedom when it is well ordered. All those who have risked their lives for their country have done so either against foreign enemies or against those exercising tyranny within the state. Examples of those doing so against foreign enemies, of which there were many among the Romans,<sup>115</sup> are irrelevant to our discussion, because they acted from love of the country of their birth and to avoid being oppressed and plundered by enemies, which does not involve the question of whether the state is controlled by the one or the few, or is a republic. It can be said that such men acted out of love of their country rather than out of love of freedom. One's own country embraces so many blessings, so many loving sentiments, that even those who live under princes love their country and many can be found who have risked their lives for it.

Those who have acted against tyrannies have either been successful in their plan to remove the tyrant or were prevented from doing so. It is difficult to give a firm verdict about what moved the latter, since we don't know whether, if they had been successful, they would have stopped there or whether they might then have attempted to go on to work for their own greatness. But we can say almost the same of them as of those who were successful in crushing the tyrant: since

<sup>115</sup> A: 'like a Scaevola, a Horatius among the Romans'.

many of these, with the passage of time, can be seen to have aimed at tyranny themselves, we must adjudge that this was also their intention from the beginning.<sup>116</sup>

This may have been the intention of many freedom-seekers who were neither great, nor honoured as they wanted to be, and saw no other way of rising. Others have certainly been moved by feelings of anger or by some injury received from the tyrant or from others, for which they were unable to take suitable revenge. Others, scared of being crushed by the tyrant, have attempted to find safety by forestalling him in this way. Others who were in economic difficulties have attempted sedition as a means of reorganising their affairs, as is often the case with the indigent. Others who were relatives and friends of someone exiled by the tyrant have procured his return through this means. There are many other possible reasons, from all of which we can infer this, that among the tyrant's enemies extremely few have been moved purely by love of the freedom of their country. These few deserve supreme praise, all the more so for being so rare. But since there are, as I say, so few of them, we cannot infer from this what universally stimulates all the rest, since – as the proverb says – one swallow does not make a summer. But at the risk of seeming too keen to annihilate this appetite for liberty, I would go on to say that perhaps most of this tiny number are moved not so much by love of liberty as by the attempt to acquire reputation and glory, knowing how glorious it is to act as its patron and protector. So it is not the common good that motivates them, but their own personal interest. Nevertheless, they deserve special praise for wanting to earn it with praiseworthy deeds and with the reputation of benefiting their country, and not with the criminal methods we have already seen some using.

So I conclude by saying that the desire for political liberty is neither as natural nor as universal as Pagolantonio suggested. If this was the case in ancient times, it is much more so in our own, which are more corrupt. This is why I say that if those who preach freedom believed that their private interest was better served

<sup>116</sup> A and B elaborate by saying some who had lowly status in the days of the tyrant may have wanted freedom as their only chance of becoming great, others, who were his intimates, in order to replace him; but since there is no example (*paragone*) of the latter, we cannot judge their intention.

in a narrow regime than in a free one, there would be few<sup>117</sup> who would not rush there at top speed. And I doubt if those elevated characters and generous souls he has talked about would be among the last to do so, since their search for freedom is almost always motivated by one of the reasons described above. As for their laments about not having the chance of demonstrating their ability effectively in a narrow regime, we shall talk about them in another part of our discussion. For now, it is enough to say only this: that those who have written about how to govern cities well, without regard for this ambition of the few, have always recommended the government of the one, when it is good. This is because governments were not instituted for the honour or profit of the rulers but for the benefit of the ruled; and in organising them the aim is not for everyone to rule but only those who are most capable. Therefore the government that has always been most approved of and called the best is the one that produces the best results. Talk away as much as you like, but in the end, unless I'm mistaken, we must return to my first premise: that it is by their results that governments have to be judged. Therefore we have to calculate which are greater, the benefits received from Medici government or those which this new popular government will produce.

**SODERINI** Although anyone who seeks liberty in order to obtain equality would never make it his ultimate objective, as you have said, one cannot however deny that there are incomparably more people in all cities who want equality than those who do not. This is because the majority enjoys a smaller share in government than it should, according to its size, and is afraid of being oppressed, while the minority enjoys more than its share and is in a position to think about being able to oppress others. So in all times the number of those who like a free regime is in a substantial majority, since it provides more equality than other regimes. From this it follows that a regime which lacks freedom is undeniably contrary to the taste and desire of the majority. And what the majority quite reasonably dislikes should be rejected, especially since the most useful type of citizens a city can have is the mediocrity in the middle; they are the ones on whom the city should build its foundations, both against those who

<sup>117</sup> A: 'extremely few and perhaps no one', as in Appendix, Maxim 66.

want to tyrannise and against the plebs who want to behave in a disorderly way.<sup>118</sup>

**BERNARDO** It is difficult to remove this impression from Pagolantonio's mind.<sup>119</sup> Nevertheless, let me say that this equality does not apply over the board – not, for example, to equality of wealth and possessions, since they decrease or grow according to how hard men work and how lucky they are – but is restricted to proper limits. For our purposes, we can consider it under two headings. First, that everyone should be equally subject to the law and no one should be oppressed by anyone else. This parity and security can be provided just as well, if not better, under another type of government when it is well ordered as in a republic; so in this instance it is unnecessary to want freedom. Under the second heading we can consider equality to mean that everyone should govern, one man as much as another. This is an unreasonable desire, because those best qualified to govern should play a larger part in magistracies and in the government, in view of the fact – as we said before – that civil authority and magistrates are instituted for the benefit of the governed, not to satisfy those who govern. Therefore one should not take any notice of those who desire freedom on this account, since what they want is unreasonable and not useful. Those who legislate for cities should not foment ambitious desires; on the contrary they should do all they can to cut them down and uproot them.

**SODERINI** I don't want to say any more at the moment. Perhaps when I have heard what else you have to say, I shall be more satisfied than I am so far. At any rate I can respond at the end of our discussion, if anything else occurs to me.

**BERNARDO** Then let's move on to the things Piero Capponi has talked about. Of the three topics he raised and dealt with so effectively, I shall begin with the second, that is, the one concerning the distribution of public honours and paid offices. For as this heading includes the election of magistrates, on whom the administration of justice and management of foreign affairs depend, it will be easier to discuss the other two if we have dealt with this one first. In it, there are three mistakes or errors to be considered: personal inadequacy, that is, when the person appointed to office does not deserve it, either

<sup>118</sup> A: 'to riot'.

<sup>119</sup> A: 'Pagolantonio has turned his mind to liberty to such an extent that he can never be detached from this impression.'

because he is not a good man<sup>120</sup> or because he is unfit for such a responsibility; family standing, that is, when offices are given to new men<sup>121</sup> of insufficient nobility for such an honour, since people's rank and status are quite distinct and in well-ordered governments they should not be confused; and third, limiting their circulation to one section of the city alone by almost always excluding another section, as if by law. The last of these errors is unjust, the second dishonourable, the first harmful to the public interest.

It seems to me that because you – or rather, those who have set up this new government – have made the Great Council responsible for electing all office-holders, many mistakes will inevitably be made. For the people will not be a good judge of men's qualities, nor will they measure everyone's weight carefully. Rather, they will go by a rough estimate and will be more influenced by certain unfounded opinions in circulation – or to put it better, by certain rumours – instead of by reason. So you will see that instead of appointing wise men who are capable of governing, often those appointed to the top offices will be men who are incapable of governing their own households and that the most successful and popular will be the quiet types, who can do little either well or badly. People often give more reputation to those who earn it by doing nothing and keeping their mouths shut than to those who have deserved it by their know-how. And if someone demonstrates that he enjoys one type of affairs, they use him unfailingly in another as remote from it as can be – as far as January is from the autumn or 'from the mulberries', as the proverb says<sup>122</sup> – imitating those unskilled doctors who use on the head ointments that are only effective on the stomach. Since the success of the city was founded, as you know, on its shops and its industry, to have the reputation for working hard at these<sup>123</sup> will be no small help in the council up the political ladder to the government. So you'll often see the Gonfaloniers of Justice, the Ten of War and the other magistrates who bear the weight of government passing into hands that are pitiful. In addition, as this government has started off with a certain reputation for latitude, there will be continual competition

<sup>120</sup> A: 'because he is bad'.

<sup>121</sup> A: 'new men unqualified for office'.

<sup>122</sup> *quanto è el gennaio dalle more*, cf. Appendix, Maxim 140.

<sup>123</sup> B: 'at being a good shopkeeper', *buono bottegaio*. On use of the word *bottega*, see Glossary.

to extend it. For everyone is staking a claim to the highest honours, and someone who has spent the last thirty years in his villa and knows nothing at all about what has been going on in the city is rushing here at top speed, convinced that he must be among the first in his quarter. You will see such a massive and widespread diffusion of the desire for office – I'm not talking about a desire for paid offices, which would be tolerable, but an ambition for the honorific and the political offices – that without any doubt these will be awarded with little differentiation. Since there are incomparably more people in the populace at large who are unfit for office, the diligence or ambition of the minority will be unable to resist this flood. I would be heartened if I could name twenty-five of those you will see enjoy support for the Gonfaloniership of Justice and the Ten, but whom I would think it excessive to appoint as members of the Five of the Contado or among the Tower Officials.<sup>124</sup> Don't believe, either, that although the people may be good or are reputed to be good, the wicked will have no place among them, because the same ignorance that will be responsible for giving to the badly-off what should be given to the well-off will often place the wicked<sup>125</sup> where the good should be. The people, as I've said, make rough and ready judgements, they don't distinguish or weigh things carefully, so they are easily deceived by someone who attempts to appear good. Each person thinks about his own trade<sup>126</sup> and makes no effort to find out how this or that person lives, so he knows nothing about the details of what anyone does. He will be more moved by the sight of a twisted neck, which one sees without looking for it, than by deeds of which he is ignorant. So it will be just as easy to slander someone who doesn't deserve it and be believed, as to say good about someone who is the opposite.

Not thinking about things and not keeping careful account breeds forgetfulness.<sup>127</sup> Because although someone may behave badly in office, to the extent that it's noticed, nevertheless it's soon forgotten. You won't deny, too, that there will be a lot of bad types in the Council who won't refrain from voting for the likes of themselves.

<sup>124</sup> On these magistracies, both of which by the sixteenth century enjoyed authority in the administration of Florence's subject territories, see G. Guidi, *Il Governo della città di Firenze del primo Quattrocento*, 3 vols., Florence, 1987, vol. III, pp. 175–7, vol. II, pp. 283–91.

<sup>125</sup> A: 'whom those who are similar cannot displease'.

<sup>126</sup> *exercizi*.

<sup>127</sup> *oblivione*.

So for these reasons, and for others that will emerge day by day, I say that, in so far as the honorary and paid offices will go to those who don't deserve them, on the grounds of inadequacy or goodness, they will in my opinion be distributed worse than they were in the days of the Medici, and worse perhaps than they would ever be in a regime like theirs. This is because whoever is in charge of such a regime examines carefully the nature and quality of men, and when it is necessary to appoint people of quality, he forces himself to do so. Nor is he easily deceived like the people, because he sees more, thinks more carefully about it; and since this is his own shop,<sup>128</sup> he keeps careful accounts and doesn't maintain himself by means of rumours and useless opinions, but plumbs the bottom of things. If he is ever deceived, since it is impossible to know about the state of every single person, he doesn't allow himself to be deceived another time. You might argue that a regime such as Lorenzo's, for example, didn't often need to be diligent, because apart from ambassadors, commissaries and similar jobs, where ability was necessary, it did not matter who the Ten, the Eight on Foreign Affairs and the Signoria were, since they inevitably bore the imprint of the master. If so, I would reply in the first place that this argument works against you, for it would have mattered little if such officials had been inadequate.<sup>129</sup> This is not the case in the popular government, where since these magistracies carry the whole weight on their shoulders, mistakes will be mortal.

Leaving this aside, I would reply that there were many reasons why a regime like the Medici's needed to retain men of means and good repute, because it was normally important to have these men as friends rather than the others. Sometimes, it is true, they found it necessary to use people who weren't good and they couldn't easily neglect someone on account of being too close friends with them. Yet there weren't so many of such men that it could be said that, excepting the ones they distrusted, the Medici didn't always prefer to cherish men who were well qualified; and they gave these men, more than the others, not only the honorary but also the salaried offices. And because Pagolantonio will tell me that they tried to keep down men of intelligence and spirit, I agree that the ruler of a state

<sup>128</sup> *bottega*.

<sup>129</sup> A: 'badly placed'.

**BERNARDO** I don't want to embark on this argument now, since we'll certainly have another much more suitable occasion to do so. But returning to where we were, I think it is clear enough that the Medici regime made fewer mistakes about the qualifications and merits of office-holders than the people will do. The people's mistakes proceed in this matter from ignorance and are thus indiscriminate and frequent, wherever they occur; whereas the Medici's were made as a test,<sup>134</sup> perhaps indeed almost always by necessity, therefore they were not indeterminate but responded to their needs or objectives.

Let us move on to the other consideration to do with nobility and family standing, where I remember that the Medici qualified many people for political office who had been ineligible. I think the popular government will do the same, and perhaps for no fewer people. Already it has been decreed, as you see, that so many should be voted on every year in the Council and those winning a majority will be qualified for office.<sup>135</sup> And perhaps this is not unreasonable, since the same happens to families and the nobility as happens to cities and worldly things: they grow old, decline and for various reasons die out, and to fill their place others must necessarily rise up and begin again. I remember, too, that among the families qualified for office, some were elevated by the Medici higher than befitted their status – as a favour, that is, not on the grounds of ability,<sup>136</sup> since to appoint for ability wouldn't have been a mistake. But I think the same thing will happen much more frequently with the Council, because in order to be able to honour the citizens and treat them differently according to their status, the Medici tried to uphold the principal offices and dignities. So the more the people were esteemed, the greater benefit they seemed to gain from it. But the people, which doesn't distinguish and doesn't have these objectives, will confuse all

<sup>134</sup> *in prova*, B: 'through malice', to which A adds 'or to put it better', with *Quod boni etiam adherebant Medicibus* ('that good people too supported the Medici') in the margin in Latin.

<sup>135</sup> On 23 December 1494 it was decreed that 24 young men (aged 24 and over) could be added to the Great Council every year by drawn nominators, and every three years 60 other citizens could be added in the same way; those who had lost their qualification through antiquity or other reasons could be qualified by a three-quarters majority of the Council (though this was revoked in 1497). See ¶2, 16, 18, ed. G. Cadoni, in 'Leggi costituzionali della repubblica fiorentina dal 1494 al 1512', *Storia e politica*, 20 (1981), pp. 163–4, 169–70.

<sup>136</sup> *virtù*.



the distinctions that used to exist between one office, and one step in the scale of honour, and the next. So if it counts as a mistake not to make distinctions in the government of a city, I think the Council will make bigger mistakes. However, I'd like to make them quits.

The last part of this first topic is the exclusion of one part of the city as though by law. Here I freely confess that what Piero Capponi said is true: the Medici and every narrow regime necessarily exclude the families opposed to them, and since political power is handed down by succession, the memory of these enmities and suspicions are conserved by their heirs. This is certainly most detestable, nor do I excuse it – on the contrary, I affirm that this would not happen in the popular regime. And if votes might be cast against a citizen or perhaps, due to a planned uprising, against a part of the city, not only would the assault not be handed down by succession but it would rarely last for long – unless for a genuine and urgent reason a law was passed to this effect, as long ago the people passed the Ordinances of Justice against whole families.<sup>137</sup>

**GUICCIARDINI** In my opinion, this first topic has been very thoroughly discussed. According to your conclusions, both types of government are about equal as far as matters involving dishonour are concerned, that is, in making new men eligible for office and ennobling low-born families. As far as injustice is concerned, that is in excluding part of the city, the Medici erred incomparably more than the people. And as for damage, in rewarding men who are neither qualified nor good, the people will err more. But I'd like to know now which of these two mistakes is more serious, to give to the undeserving or to exclude a part of the city – and their heirs – who are deserving.

**BERNARDO** If we were only dealing with private interest, I would blame the Medici more, because taking is odious, giving is a kindness, so I think one should blame someone who gives to the undeserving less than someone who takes from the deserving. But since it is the public interest that is involved, I would say, talking as philosophers – whom I have always heard prefer what is right to what is useful in such discussions<sup>138</sup> – that the Medici will be more blameworthy, because it is worse to depart from moral rectitude than expediency.

<sup>137</sup> Referring to the 1293 Ordinances which deprived magnate families of political rights and invoked specially heavy penalties against crimes committed by them.

<sup>138</sup> Discussed especially by Cicero, *De officiis*, bk. III.

However, judging by the considerations that normally influence cities, perhaps the people will err more. For giving administrative responsibility to someone who doesn't merit it damages the public interest, since it causes troubles and sometimes the ruin of states; whereas excluding someone who does deserve it, provided the government remains in competent hands, damages the person who has been excluded rather than the republic; and everyone knows that public considerations must be preferred to private ones.

CAPPONI It also seems to harm the public interest, however, because the party which is excluded will remain discontented and will be continually plotting insurrection.

BERNARDO The well-qualified citizens are not very happy, either, when they see what they deserve going to the undeserving, so they turn to sedition and schemes to change the government. This can much more easily happen in a popular regime than in one like the Medici's, so one should avoid upsetting the men of ability more than the others.

GUICCIARDINI But what do you have to say about taxes?

BERNARDO Let me say first of all that you mustn't cite the situation at the beginning of Cosimo's regime to exemplify this or any other evil. Our discussion arose from my saying that I didn't believe this revolution was useful, referring to these last years of Lorenzo's and then to Piero's regime, not to the beginnings of Cosimo's, which like all other newly-established regimes was very harsh and full of bad precedents. For anyone who founds a regime with power restricted to a few has to secure and stabilise it, uprooting all obstacles more violently and unscrupulously than is necessary to preserve them, once they are launched and established. Here Cosimo perhaps deserves some excuse for using taxes to protect himself against his enemies and those he suspected, instead of the daggers those who control similar regimes normally use.

As for subsequent taxes, I will revert to the same premise I shall have to repeat several times today, that is, that the errors committed by a narrow regime by malice or necessity are the same as those the popular regime will often commit through ignorance. Whenever the mistakes are equal, so is the damage they do, whether it is done for one of these reasons or the other – indeed, ignorance is more frightening because, as I said above, it has neither measure nor rule. I admit that as far as taxes were concerned, the citizens belonging to

the regime were treated more considerately than the others, who by comparison were overburdened; I admit, too, that sometimes someone was treated badly for more specific reasons. But let me say that even the people will do the same, because they will often choose as tax assessors people who know as little about this as about other things. Taxes, except when levied on real estate, require great prudence and men who know the city and the circumstances of its citizens well, and even then it will be difficult not to make a lot of mistakes. So think how many mistakes will be made when they are in the hands of those who know little about these things – apart from the fact that such men will have relations and friends, as well as enemies, to consider, ensuring that they'll commit a few sins because of their private passions and quite a lot through ignorance.

As far as methods of taxation are concerned, I can assure you that the people's will normally be much worse and more unjust, because by nature they like to overburden the better-off; and since the less well-off are more numerous, it is not difficult for them to do this. Normally the methods they propose hit the rich harder than they should and lead to their ruin. This is harmful to the city, because everyone should be preserved according to his position: the rich should be cherished, not destroyed, because they always bring honour to their country<sup>139</sup> and help to the poor, and in times of need they support the state. Lorenzo and the other Medici took great care to see that their methods of taxation were always as effective and fair as possible. As for passing a tax based on law, I agree with Piero Capponi that the Medici wouldn't have liked it, I think, because they wanted to keep taxes in their hands as a stick to beat people with.<sup>140</sup> But because I have heard it discussed thousands of times, I tell you that, unless I am mistaken, it would be an extremely difficult weapon to wield – for reasons I could explain, except that it would prolong our discussion quite unnecessarily.

CAPPONI It comes back to the same point. If under the popular government taxes will be imposed unfairly, it won't always be against the same persons but as luck will have it, depending on the ignorance or passions of whoever's job it is to impose them. So an assessment which falls sometimes on one person, sometimes on another, will be

<sup>139</sup> *patria*; A: 'city'.

<sup>140</sup> *el bastone delle gravanze*.

less harmful and less unjust than one which always remains fixed in the same place.

**BERNARDO** However,<sup>141</sup> once one has been entered incorrectly<sup>142</sup> in the tax registers, it's easier for things to go from bad to worse than for the mistake to be corrected. Apart from this, I am not quite sure that even with this Council, one side might not be more heavily clobbered with taxes than the other. Who, for example, is going to ensure that those others of us who are considered to be friends of the Medici are not unfairly burdened with taxes, who are now the victims of hatred, envy and suspicion? To do so would be quite unjust, especially if no distinction is made between those who, despite enjoying the favour of the regime, have not enjoyed unjust tax assessments and have not in any single matter lorded it over others, from those who have behaved differently. The latter might think it less strange to suffer a little in this way if they receive no other punishment for their sins. But to attack in the ordinary course of events a citizen who has committed no fault, apart from having enjoyed the favour of the Medici, is extremely strange – indeed, one ought instead to try to preserve him. For there can be no better guarantee of his good behaviour in a free regime under the rule of law than to see that he has behaved in the same way in a narrow regime, where he basked in favour and the freedom to behave as he liked.<sup>143</sup> It is certainly true that one should do everything possible to prevent a well-instituted city from succumbing to tyranny. Yet if through bad luck or the disposition of the heavens a tyrant does arise, it doesn't seem to me – since he was introduced through no efforts of their own – that one should mark down as bad citizens those who attempt to enjoy a position in the narrow regime, without changing their habits or abusing their authority; and especially not those who enjoy some standing, for if they want to play the risky game of distancing themselves, they soon come to be suspected of being enemies of the state.

If the only damage this did was to deprive them of honorary offices, they would deserve to be called ambitious if they tried to win them by supporting the regime. But it is impossible for a well-qualified man to live tranquilly in a city where the head of the narrow regime

<sup>141</sup> Preceded by an illegible word.

<sup>142</sup> *segnato male*.

<sup>143</sup> *aveva caldo e licenzia*.

**BERNARDO** I will tell you briefly what I think. If you want taxes to be imposed by law, they must be based either on the income derived from land and possessions, or on trade and mobile wealth. Since in Florence real estate constitutes the smallest part of our wealth, income from it is insufficient for our needs. To base it on trade and mobile wealth is partly impossible, because money circulates in many ways that are invisible, and partly difficult and dishonest – difficult because it would be too labourious to have to keep account of all the contracts, trade and exchanges entered into; and because business deals are often based on credit,<sup>146</sup> it is dishonest to have to publicise a merchant's true state of affairs.

So if the law can base itself firmly only on the income from real estate, it must as a supplement rely on increasing the gabelles or the prices of flour and salt. In comparison with the rest of Italy, these are already bearing more than their fair share of the tax burden; to increase it further would be unjust and create such an outcry from the working classes<sup>147</sup> that it would be difficult to find anyone willing to suggest it and bear the responsibility for something which would generate such ill feeling that it might perhaps one day prove their undoing. It would therefore be very useful to find a reasonable system of taxation, since it would provide a guarantee that people would not be clobbered with taxes, which would be one of the important things our city might have. But since these are matters that are much easier to talk about than put into effect, if such a system has not been found by former regimes,<sup>148</sup> I think it is unlikely that it will be discovered by the Great Council.

But let's move on, if you like, to the first of the headings defined by Piero Capponi, that is, the observance of justice, the most important thing there is. For it was principally to maintain justice that liberties and good governments were established, in order that everyone should be secure from oppression, both in his person and in his possessions. This was the reason, according to Messer Marsilio – from whom I have sometimes learned a thing or two – that Plato entitled that book of his about republics 'On Justice', since he wanted to show that this was the principal objective to be aimed for.<sup>149</sup> So

<sup>146</sup> A adds 'in Florence'.

<sup>147</sup> *popolo minuto*.

<sup>148</sup> B: 'by the Medici regime'.

<sup>149</sup> This allusion to Marsilio Ficino and Plato's *Republic* is omitted in A.

mistakes made here matter more than all the others, because they strike against the most substantial part and, so to speak, the soul of cities.

As I have already said more than once, men err in two ways, either by ignorance or by malice. You know my views on ignorance, from which you can conclude that the errors that can arise from ignorance in administering justice will happen more frequently in the popular government. As for malice, I tell you that all men are by nature inclined to goodness, nor does anyone who stands to gain equally from good and evil not naturally prefer the good – and if any of these extremely rare cases are found, they deserve to be called animals rather than men, since they lack that inclination which is natural to almost all men. It is true that human nature is very fragile and can be diverted from the straight and narrow path by the slightest opportunity, and that the things that lead man astray – that is, lusts and passions – are so many and are so powerful against a nature as weak as his, that if there were no other remedies apart from what everyone can do for himself, very few would not be corrupted. It's therefore been necessary for founders of states to think about ways of keeping men firm in their original natural inclination. This is why rewards and punishments were invented. Where they do not exist or are badly instituted, you will never see any form of civil life that is successful; nor without this spur and this brake can you ever expect men to behave particularly well.

So to judge where we shall find more intentional mistakes in administering justice, in the time of the Medici or during the popular regime, we must consider where rewards and punishments play a greater part in their decisions. Here, if I'm not mistaken, there is no small difference between them, because an official who comports himself well has little to hope for from the people, whereas one who behaves badly has little to fear, since the people – as I have said – are by nature indiscriminating, and they are unreflective and forgetful. So at the end of the day,<sup>150</sup> the one who behaved badly in his first office will get another one as easily as the one who behaved well, especially if you get rid of this majority vote, as I think will soon happen. And related to this, if an official does do wrong, where will one be able to turn to get redress? There will be no remedy at all,

<sup>150</sup> lit. 'at the end of the game', *in capo del gioco*.

because there will be no one with the necessary powers. Very often, too, the person responsible may perhaps be well-intentioned, but when he has to deal with leading citizens, he will be cautious about doing anything; for in free regimes the paths of citizens frequently cross,<sup>151</sup> and without a single head to defend you from injustice, everybody fears what is very likely to happen to him if he upsets others.

These arguments largely ceased to operate in Lorenzo's day because he kept careful watch on people's behaviour, so pleasing him acted as a reward and being in his bad books served as a punishment, since it was obvious that the one helped you to advance, the other kept you back. So everyone took great care not to fail in his duty. This was a greater constraint than either the Council or a law will provide. So if you were charged, you had a ready remedy: he was your recourse, and he your court of appeal. And when a magistrate did commit an injustice towards someone, he was often pulled back on to the right road by a scolding.<sup>152</sup> Men were more enthusiastic about carrying out punishments, because they were more frightened of not satisfying Lorenzo than of displeasing a citizen, whoever he was. And you knew that you would have someone to defend you, if for that reason anyone wanted to do you wrong. So if the magistrates have less incentive and less control, who will doubt that they will see less justice is done? Because relations, friends, presents and other means will bend the person who has to judge. Nor do I know whether people will be safer from these foreign judges in charge of civil justice being swayed by the prayers of friends and bribes, than they were when they used to be given careful and particular reminders to hold the scales of justice in balance.<sup>153</sup> Talking of which, it is perhaps true that some injustice was done in Piero's day at his request. If so, it happened very rarely, as I know you won't deny, but not already – perhaps not all – in the time of Lorenzo.<sup>154</sup> Nor did he have a chan-

<sup>151</sup> *riscontra*; A adds 'with one coming to blows with' (*venire alle mani di*).

<sup>152</sup> *tirati gli orecchi*, 'by having his ears pulled'.

<sup>153</sup> Probably an anachronistic reference to the five judges appointed by the university according to the law reform 1502, although the law had in fact been first proposed in 1494 on the eve of the Medici's fall. See L. Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft in Renaissance Florence*, Princeton, 1968, pp. 140–41, A. Zorzi, *L'amministrazione della giustizia penale nella repubblica fiorentina. Aspetti e problemi*, Florence, 1988, pp. 97–104.

<sup>154</sup> A adds, 'And if you tell me that some injustice was done in the field of civil justice at Lorenzo's request I say – and I know you won't deny it – that this happened extremely rarely in Piero's day, but in Lorenzo's perhaps never.'

cellor or minister who would have dared to make recommendations to the judges. Even the leading citizens made few recommendations, I think, and any there were counted for little, because the judges<sup>155</sup> took much more notice of the memos of the boss<sup>156</sup> than of the demands of other people. So the civil justice exercised by the Six and the other magistracies<sup>157</sup> was clean as far as the government was concerned; and the care taken over the scrutinies of the Mercanzia never served this purpose that I saw, nor did it lack reputation for this reason – since one knows its judgements were deficient and corrupt long before, in the way of all things on this earth. Nor did the chancellors the Medici kept there for their own benefit serve any purpose except to feed their friends<sup>158</sup> and perhaps as a source of information about everyone's movements and behaviour, learning about the qualities and the passions of the citizens to profit from what they knew. For this was the trade in which they had themselves set up shop,<sup>159</sup> keeping accounts and information about everything.

The same arguments apply to criminal as well as civil justice. So I don't want to deny that in criminal justice, in Florence as elsewhere, it was frequently necessary to have special regard for the friends of the regime and their dependants<sup>160</sup> – although they almost always punished every crime, to a greater or a lesser degree. For justice to be effectively upheld, it would be quite enough to punish all crimes with a fine of merely twelve shillings for every pound – apart from those that were very atrocious<sup>161</sup> – provided they were all punished. Scandalous cases or ones that set a bad example were punished. Where there were special considerations to be taken into account, pains were taken not to cause an upset, part of the penalty always being to know one had offended Lorenzo or was in his bad books. In short, I do not deny that criminal justice could have been much stricter and more generally applied than it was. I do say, however,

<sup>155</sup> A adds 'knew who was the boss and'.

<sup>156</sup> *capo*.

<sup>157</sup> A: 'and in the consulates', suggesting Guicciardini had in mind the guild courts, which like the Mercantile Court of Six exercised limited justice in civil affairs.

<sup>158</sup> i.e. by giving them jobs; A adds, 'and perhaps to use for themselves if necessary, although they didn't do so, but much more for'.

<sup>159</sup> *si stava a bottega a questo mestiero*: see Glossary.

<sup>160</sup> A adds 'and this proceeded by order of Lorenzo'.

<sup>161</sup> A: 'I have many times heard it said by experienced men, and have even thought so myself, that it would be quite enough to penalise crimes at fifteen shillings per pound', i.e. by reducing them by three-fifths or a quarter. Cf. Appendix Maxim 46.



Discussion of the laws falls very well under this heading, I think – I'm not talking about laws against violence and fraud,<sup>164</sup> because these are dealt with sufficiently under criminal matters. I mean those passed to reform the city and adorn it, to limit superfluous expenditure and encourage good customs and civic behaviour. Here one cannot deny that a narrow regime provides better laws, which are better and more easily observed than an open government. The reason for this is obvious, since the ruler has no particular interest in making them one way rather than another, to suit himself; rather, it is in his interest simply that cities and the people's possessions are well organised and that wealth is preserved. It does him honour when public affairs appear to be well understood and managed, and he is the one who gains favour and reputation. Therefore he has every reason to want laws to be well made and to be observed. And presupposing – as we must – that this is what he wants, he knows how to do it better, because he understands more than the populace. If pleasing to him, laws are made;<sup>165</sup> if desired by him, they are observed. This does not happen in an open government, where men's desires differ and do not easily concur in the same opinion. Then there are the impediments described above in ensuring laws are observed, that is to say, men's personal considerations and their negligence.

Remember the laws on adornment and expenditure passed when Messer Luigi Guicciardini was Gonfalonier of Justice,<sup>166</sup> how keen Lorenzo was to prescribe them and to ensure they were observed. Because of this they were well understood and clear, and they were then observed as well as any law ever made in this city – despite the fact that it is difficult to uphold such laws; for in ensuring they are observed, you offend the person who is condemned; and in not doing so, you incur little blame, because no one is directly offended; the ensuing damage doesn't obviously harm a third party but emerges later and in such a way that no one is moved to complain. Therefore I certainly believe that laws would never have been observed for so long in an open regime, because respect for Lorenzo and his example was more effective than penalties. I remember that he never wanted

<sup>164</sup> A: 'against crimes such as woundings, homicides, theft, fraud and such things'.

<sup>165</sup> A: 'it is his arbitrary decision (*in suo arbitrio*) to get them made'.

<sup>166</sup> Passed in March–April 1473, the law against gaming on 23 April being renewed on 24 January 1514, after the Medici were restored to power. See Brown, *Bartolomeo Scala*, pp. 78–9, notes 52 and 53. Luigi was Guicciardini's great-uncle.

his children to wear scarlet cloth, although it was quite legal and everyone wore it, simply because he wanted to prevent anyone having reason to think they were wearing the crimson cloth which was prohibited.<sup>167</sup> If there is nothing else you would like to say, there remains the topic concerning the defence and expansion of the dominion for me to discuss.

CAPPONI There is nothing else at the moment, and I don't want to interrupt you.

SODERINI The same goes for me, since we can go back over anything that occurs to us at the end, so go on with your argument.

BERNARDO If you were as persuaded by what I've said so far, as I'm sure you will be by what I shall say in this last part, we'll find ourselves agreeing too closely with each other! For there seems to me to be no doubt that the Medici regime was just as competent at preserving and expanding the dominion as the popular regime will be. The preservation and expansion of the dominion depend on outside factors, that is, the behaviour of the other powers, who continually think of expansion and usurping the territory of others; those in no position to hope to do this, do everything possible to preserve what they have. Incredible diligence and industry are necessary to defend oneself from the machinations of the first and to overcome the vigilance of the second. To do so, counsel and force are required, two things which were both much more vigorous and prompt in the Medici regime than they will be in a government of the masses. Things of this sort don't follow prescribed rules or a determined course; rather, they are subject to daily changes according to what's happening in the world. The decisions that have to be made almost always have to be based on conjectures; and very often things of the greatest importance depend on one small movement, the weightiest consequences often deriving from beginnings that are scarcely noticeable.<sup>168</sup> So the ruler of a state must be a man of great prudence, he should watch every minute happening with extreme vigilance, and after weighing up all possible eventualities he should try above all to prevent new things beginning and exclude as far as possible the power of chance and fortune.

<sup>167</sup> The distinction is between *drappi di grana* and *drappi chermisi*, both deriving from the insect dye *Kermococcus vermilio*. A sumptuary law of 29 February 1472 prohibited everyone, except knights and doctors, from wearing *chermisi* except as lining or belts. See C. Mazzi, *Due provvisioni suntuarie fiorentine*, Florence, 1908, pp. 9-10.

<sup>168</sup> Cf. *Ricordo C 82*, ed. Spongano, p. 93, tr. Domandi, p. 62.

These are the special characteristics of a regime where authority resides in a single person or in a few, because they have the time, the diligence and the concentration to devote to thinking about these things. When they recognise the need, they have the means to take measures according to the situation. All this is quite alien to a government of the masses, because the multitude don't think, don't concentrate, don't see and understand nothing until things are reduced to the point where they are obvious to everyone. And then only with the greatest difficulty and danger, and with intolerable expense, is it possible to correct what could initially have been provided for safely, and at little cost or effort. It is not enough to have one or two wise men in the city who can see what's happening in good time, for when they propose remedies, the majority, who are not open to reason, raise an outcry. Attributing their actions to ambition or some other personal desire, the majority not only obstruct the measures on that occasion but are also responsible for deterring the same men, seeing themselves mocked and under suspicion, from daring to point out danger on another occasion. The masses always hold the opinion that men of excellence are not content with a free republican way of life and so continually desire wars and troubles to have the chance of suffocating liberty – or at least to make the city employ them more than they do in peacetime. So the masses are unmoved by the authority of these men, because they don't trust them; they are not persuaded by their arguments, because they don't understand them. Because of this fallacy many republics have been ruined, a great many have lost splendid opportunities for increasing their dominions, and infinite numbers of them have been enmeshed in vast expenses and dangers.

In the days of our fathers, Filippo Maria Visconti wanted to recover the old Visconti state that had been fragmented into many parts by the death of Gian Galeazzo, his father. So he tried to lull our republic by demanding from us an extremely honourable peace and one which would have been as secure as could possibly be desired, had it lasted.<sup>169</sup> Niccolò da Uzzano and a few other wise men recognised his deception, seeing that he had no desire for peace and friendship with us but instead wanted, in this way, to remove us as an obstacle, so he could stabilise his situation in Lombardy and acquire Genoa

<sup>169</sup> The peace was approved in Florence on 28–9 November 1419 after being rejected a month earlier, and was signed on 8 February 1420. See Brucker, *The Civic World*, p. 433. On the ensuing war with Filippo Maria and Florence's alliance with Venice in December 1425, see *ibid.*, pp. 433–71.

narrow regime to understand the secrets and deceptions of the other powers. For apart from not employing the same diligence, who wants to reveal a hidden secret in a place which not only offers no rewards but where it will no sooner be said than publicised? For to reveal it to one or two citizens is useless, to tell it to *pratiche* and Councils is tantamount to announcing it by street crier.<sup>172</sup> So it is not only private citizens, prepared to reveal something in hope of rewards or for other ends, who do not dare to do so; leading citizens also talk with great reserve, since they lack the courage to discuss business they want kept secret with a city governed by the people. This business of secrecy is doubly damaging, for not knowing the plans of others you can't take measures against them, and since they know yours, your plans are interrupted before time. Who is there in the enemy's army or in a place<sup>173</sup> you want to acquire who will dare to have dealings with you? And if you happen to find any mad enough to do so, they will rarely keep it secret, since every discussion has to pass through many people's hands. Nevertheless you know that these are the means used to conduct great affairs.

Further, in many cases speed is necessary and in such states this is not to be hoped for. The opportunity will present itself, but it will be of such short duration that before the *pratica* meets, takes a decision and despatches it, the occasion will have gone.<sup>174</sup> Then too it is usually impossible to make acquisitions or escape dangers without joining up with some other power. This comes about only when both are moved by common interests, which wise rulers<sup>175</sup> measure with daily events and by discussing the state of everything over the course of many years. Therefore coalitions and alliances that have survived for some time are much more productive than those made in time of personal need; for apart from enjoying greater mutual trust, matters are better discussed, better directed, and organised so they can be rapidly put into action, whereas there is never time to organise what is necessary when one has to start unexpectedly from scratch. These long-standing alliances are difficult to make with a popular government, because the same men are not always in office. Since

<sup>172</sup> *bandirlo*.

<sup>173</sup> C: *terra*; A: 'city'.

<sup>174</sup> Variant in A, ending 'so that one has never time to capture anything but a lame hare'.

<sup>175</sup> *principi savi*.

opinions and objectives may vary accordingly, a princely ruler, not believing he can establish a firm relationship with these types of government and not knowing whom he has to deal and come to an agreement with, places little hope in them; he does not confide in you, planning that when your moment comes and you are in need, you should rely as little on him as he hopes to rely on you.

It was the close understanding that existed between the King of Naples, the Milanese state and Florence, involving few people, that provided effective protection against the greatness of Venice and the many unforeseen events that could have upset Italy. Had God not wished for its destruction through Italy's ill fortune, the ambition of Lord Lodovico, the pride of King Alfonso and perhaps Piero de' Medici's lack of prudence,<sup>176</sup> we wouldn't now be a prey to barbarians.<sup>177</sup> But if amongst these three powers there had been a popular government, this union in my view would have been impossible, or it would have broken up much earlier. Don't think I am labouring to demonstrate that people are unaware of the beginnings and origin of developments that subsequently have very important consequences, in the belief that once discovered, they deal with them very effectively. On the contrary, I know you will admit that apart from lacking the necessary secrecy and speed, all matters that have to be decided by many people suffer in addition from irresolution, since very often there is no agreement and one's man point of view is not another's. As a result it takes much longer to reach a decision than it should, or the decision is unclear. This doesn't only happen in large meetings. If you put even eight or ten wise men together, they will generate so many different opinions that they will be deemed mad. You can see this exemplified every day by doctors. If more than one doctor is consulted over a cure, even though they may be excellent, they easily disagree with each other and often murder the patient with their controversies.

Where many people are involved in discussions, there is a danger of corruption; for as private individuals who do not hold the common

<sup>176</sup> A. 'madness'.

<sup>177</sup> Lodovico Sforza il Moro and Alfonso II of Naples. The triple alliance was first established in 1454-5, reconfirmed in 1470 and 1480; G. Nebbia, 'Le lega italiana del 1455: sue vicende e sua rinnovazione nel 1470', *Archivio storico italiano*, 4 (1939) pp. 115-35; reasons for its collapse encouraging the French invasion of 1494 are analysed in greater detail in *History of Florence*, pp. 86-9.

interest as their own, they can be easily corrupted by promises and princely gifts. I have heard it said more than once that Alexander the Great's father founded his state as much by corrupting the heads of the free republics<sup>178</sup> of Greece as by force of arms. There is no fear of this with a single ruler, for as sole boss<sup>179</sup> in the state he will not let himself be bought to give away or upset what he regards as his own. This is why I say that the decisions of popular governments are unsound, not only initially, in their beginnings, but in every stage they go through right up to the end. This is most apparent in the management of wars, which require more prudence, and where it is evidently easier to repent mistakes that have been made than it is to correct them. In addition they can trust captains and soldiers much less than a single person can,<sup>180</sup> for there is almost a natural hostility between mercenary soldiers and the people. The latter only use mercenaries in wars because they have no alternative; when peace is made, they do not remunerate them but send them packing and, if they can, persecute them. Mercenaries, knowing they serve no one, either think of prolonging the war to derive profit from it as long as possible, or they turn their minds to ingratiating themselves with the ruler who is their enemy – or at least they serve the people coldly, for having no love for them and hoping for nothing from them, they can't do so enthusiastically. So in our fathers' day, wise citizens always advised against waging war unless necessary. This advice I approve, except that it is inadequate. For it is very often necessary to wage war; and very often, if one has the means to conduct it well, an opportunity presents itself that it would be most useful to have taken. So you see why this advice is inadequate, and in how many ways – which you can think about for yourselves – a government is weakened by having to be advised to beware of wars, which would often be useful and often necessary.

In short, to return to what we were talking about to start with, government of the many is lacking in quite a number of important things: secrecy, speed and, what is worse, resolution. Therefore we frequently see a republic remaining neutral in the wars of other states, something which is very often lethal<sup>181</sup> – and will be especially so in the times that

<sup>178</sup> lit. 'free cities'; 'republics' in A.

<sup>179</sup> *padrone*.

<sup>180</sup> A: 'a prince or a government of one alone'.

<sup>181</sup> A adds 'and the ruin of states'.

lie ahead, when as a result of the French descent into Italy, affairs will be controlled more by those who are most powerful and have the readiest arms than in the past. When war is between two powers<sup>182</sup> who are not as powerful as you are, thanks to your own forces or to the support you enjoy, the fear is that the one who is the victor can oppress you. Neutrality is then a good policy, not only because during their war you avoid the troubles and expense you would bear if you entered, but also because, as the others wear themselves out, you in a sense become more powerful and are sometimes given the chance of increasing your dominion through the weakness of others. This is the way in which the Venetians, by standing and watching their neighbours' quarrels, have often increased their power. For them, neutrality has always been a prudent policy, because they were so powerful that the victory of one of the combatants was never likely to endanger them. But when the victor, whichever he is, remains more powerful than you, then neutrality is a bad policy, because you will be at his mercy, whoever wins, and he won't have to consider you; whereas if you had adhered to one of them, you could at least hope that if he won you wouldn't be destroyed.<sup>183</sup>

A popular government is much more likely to make the mistake of remaining neutral than a one-man government – or, to put it better, than the Medici government. The reasons for this are obvious: the sweetness of leisure and the present peace, which blinds anyone who thinks little about future dangers; the citizens' disinclination to spend money, for fear it will be taken from their own pockets; the readiness to be deceived by those at war, because at least one of them – that is, the one who seems most powerful or who fears you might lean more towards the other side – thinking he can profit considerably from your neutrality, will always suggest to you that your neutrality is all he wants of you, that if you are neutral he will not be offended and you will have nothing to fear from his victory. More often, however, this mistake is due to irresolution, because the consultative meetings and the councils do not agree: one inclines to this side, the other to that side, either through bribery, or through strong passions,

<sup>182</sup> *principi*; A: 'potentates'.

<sup>183</sup> A adds a long passage on the dangers of the French arrival in Italy opening the way 'to other ultramontane nations'. This will encourage wars between extremely powerful princes in which neutrality will be pernicious, for the wars will be conducted with such speed that 'a state will be lost more quickly than a castle was in our day', and temporising to delay the enemy will be impossible.

or even because opinions are very diverse.<sup>184</sup> Since there are never enough people of the same opinion to prevail, no decision is taken at all. What is worse than neutrality is for you to remain neutral without ever deciding that you want to remain neutral. Because if you decided on it from the beginning and assured yourselves or made a written agreement with the side which proposed it, the mistake would be less serious, since it would be a form of commitment – indeed, in some situations, it would be the best course of action. But failure to make a decision displeases everyone, even the person who asks for neutrality, since it keeps him in suspense and dissatisfied, and you lose the chance of reassuring yourselves about him and concluding an agreement. So if he is then left as victor, he regards you as an enemy, and you have given him, or rather thrown away, the neutrality that he wanted to buy from you.

**GUICCIARDINI** There are, however, some other occasions when neutrality is useful – which I could cite, if they weren't irrelevant to our discussion.

**BERNARDO** Don't let us embark on that now – what I have said is true, but there are exceptions to every rule. In the things of this world<sup>185</sup> these are learnt more by using one's discretion, which can distinguish them well enough, or from finding them in books. Anyone who considers the circumstances of the case should be capable of distinguishing them. Although neutrality is sometimes good for various special reasons apart from those I mentioned, nonetheless, generally speaking it is not good. Any sensible person who considers the reason for this conclusion will easily know how to identify the exceptions and make the right decision when the situation arises. For all these reasons and many others which it would take too long to relate, the popular government will be much less adept at preserving and increasing the dominion than the Medici regime was. And don't disprove me by quoting the example of the Romans, who despite having a widely-based and republican government acquired such a vast empire. Although I am scarcely qualified to talk about ancient matters, knowing only bits and pieces about them from what others have told me, or from the odd book that has been translated – and quite badly, in my opinion – into the vernacular, it doesn't seem to

<sup>184</sup> Cf. *Ricordo* C 68, ed. Spongano, pp. 78–9, tr. Domandi, p. 59.

<sup>185</sup> A: 'or as you others say, *in agibilibus*'.



me that the Roman method of government was capable of supporting such greatness. For it was structured in such a way as to encourage strife and tumults, so that without the prowess of their army, which was incredibly vigorous and well instituted, I am certain they would have been unable to make great progress. And this is no less striking in the time of the kings than later when the republic was free. Where one relies on one's own arms, especially if they are as excellent and efficacious as theirs were, one can afford to relax that vigilance and sensitive care that is necessary for those who depend on negotiations and deception. Nor did the rulers of the city in those days have any trouble in persuading the people to undertake a new venture, either to avoid a danger or to increase their empire.<sup>186</sup> For they were military men who did not know how to live without war. War was their trade,<sup>187</sup> from which they drew riches, honours and reputation. So you cannot model yourself on these examples if your situation is different in kind and quality from theirs. And if Pagolantonio ripostes that we could arm ourselves, I shall respond later, showing you that, unless I am mistaken, many of the things which are thought to be impossible could still be done, provided one uses the right methods – but for various reasons and because of various impediments these are not used.

You may perhaps think, from the way my argument has been going, that the danger run by a popular government in not embarking on necessary undertakings, or doing so late, is counterbalanced by the fact that, for the same reason, it abstains from unnecessary and dangerous undertakings. For this is one of the reasons why rulers are frequently destroyed who often embark on badly-calculated enterprises from ambition,<sup>188</sup> from which they ultimately perish. However, here too I think the people make more mistakes, because they consider things less, understand less, know less. So they often deem something to be extremely easy that later turns out to be very difficult, and they embark on the most dangerous enterprises on the basis of a light hope and a weak foundation. In our fathers' day, following the peace settlement which concluded the first war with Duke Filippo, Niccolò di Stella entered the territory of Lucca with a certain number of troops; and after taking some castles, he proposed to our

<sup>186</sup> B: 'lordship'.

<sup>187</sup> *bottega*.

<sup>188</sup> A adds 'for power [*stato*] or honour'.

boldly on the undertaking now, you will not win; you will spend an infinite amount of money and you will incur such ill will<sup>192</sup> that you will be placed in great trouble and perhaps in danger of the rest.<sup>193</sup> Nevertheless, everyone is so fired by the idea that anyone who put forward this opinion now would be heavily criticised.<sup>194</sup>

**GUICCIARDINI** So would you recommend leaving Pisa as it is at the moment?

**BERNARDO** Leaving it as it is wouldn't be good, because things would become all the more stabilised and also we would to some extent lose our just claims. Therefore I would recommend the middle way, that is, embarking on the enterprise with only enough provisions to reacquire the *contado*; and after equipping two or three places, to destroy the others and always remember at harvest time to lay waste to their crops. In this way you will continually manage to weaken and wear them out without throwing money away uselessly, especially since the other powers, seeing you taking no immediate risks, would not support them strongly enough to bother you; nor would they think of creating a diversion from your exploits. You would find your money supplies intact,<sup>195</sup> with which anyone who knows how to put them to good use will get from these ultramontanes all he wants. Some favourable opportunity will easily arise, apart from the fact that a body, when it is wasted, almost always collapses quite suddenly. Now such a course of action won't perhaps be adopted for several years, by which time you will be exhausted and desperate to acquire Pisa by other means. And if I'm not still alive, as seems likely, you younger men will remember and be all the readier to believe me when I say that important enterprises are badly understood and organised by popular regimes. This is serious enough at any time, but it will matter much more in the present storm which is raging. Now that this plague has entered Italy from beyond the Alps, I fear it will be the beginning of the greatest calamities, and in stormy times good governments are much more necessary than at other times.

**SODERINI** Although no remedy will any longer be in time for affairs in the Kingdom of Naples, if we conclude this great league between the Pope, the Emperor, the King of Spain, the Venetians and the

<sup>192</sup> *umori*.

<sup>193</sup> The meaning of this is clarified by A: 'your freedom will perhaps be endangered'.

<sup>194</sup> A: 'would perhaps be stoned to death'.

<sup>195</sup> 'fresh'.

Duke of Milan, it could be the beginning of the expulsion of the French<sup>196</sup> from Italy; and once expelled, perhaps they will never return here.

**BERNARDO** The kingdom, as you say, is lost; and their entry into Italy and acquisition of their first objective has been so successful that I don't know if it will be so easy to chase them out. Even if this happens, I doubt if this will be the end of the game. For the power of France is great, and they have already begun to learn the way here, having tasted the sweetness of this province and become enflamed by it. Nor will they lack reasons and opportunities to come, now that the union of Italy has been shattered and the links that held it together broken. If the league at present being negotiated is successfully concluded, it won't remain united for longer than the present danger; then everything will become more confused than ever.

Even if the Aragonese return to the Kingdom of Naples, it will be weak and perhaps dismembered; you without Pisa and with the sore of powerful exiles; a Pope who is ambitious and craving for change; the Venetians whose objective everyone naturally knows about; Lord Lodovico, who to say the least is less intelligent than he is held to be,<sup>197</sup> but who will be still full of vanity and insolence if he succeeds in bringing back King Charles of France, having got himself made Duke of Milan after the Aragonese and Piero de' Medici destroyed his power. I'm sure he is thinking about the situation in Pisa, and I fear the Venetians are turning their minds to it, since it is their nature always to espouse such occasions. So it could be Pisa that rekindles the fire in Italy, and if it isn't Pisa, there will be no dearth of other sparks.<sup>198</sup> Everyone who is ambitious, angry or fearful, unable to satisfy himself or protect himself by other means, will attempt to get the ultramontanes to come. The more successful the Duke of Milan is, the more others will take heart. In order to expel the French, as you see, they are now beginning to talk about the Germans and the Spanish. So not only do I see no guarantee that the French will not remain here or return to Italy, I am afraid that in addition the way

<sup>196</sup> 'their expulsion': I have added 'of the French'. The League of Venice was concluded on 31 March 1495 between Alexander VI, Maximilian I, Ferdinand of Spain, Venice and Lodovico il Moro, to expel Charles VIII of France from Italy (achieved by the end of the year), but Florence refused to join.

<sup>197</sup> B: 'was never intelligent'.

<sup>198</sup> In fact, changing the metaphor, 'seeds'.

is open to other nations. This will be our ultimate ruination. For while they are in agreement, they will eat up Italy; if they break up, they will lacerate her; and if by chance one of the ultramontanes chases out the others, Italy will remain in extreme servitude. These things will be more or less in the hands of God, but one cannot deny that strange times lie ahead. Just when we need the best doctor, we shall have the worst. I don't need to say how important this topic of preserving the dominion is, because all of you know it.

**SODERINI** I won't deny it is of the greatest importance. But following the order of nature, what we first have to think about and attempt is becoming free, or being well governed, and then we can think of dominating others. Therefore of the three topics discussed by Piero Capponi, the first two that concern our own existence are more important than the one concerning our dominion; and if the popular government might have had an advantage over the Medici in the first two, or at least in the one concerning justice, even if less effective in the third, it wouldn't be worse than them.

**BERNARDO** Pagolantonio, you are deceiving yourself, because you want to divide things that cannot be divided. If a city that was content with its freedom and its small territory was left alone by others, you would be quite right. But this isn't the case with us and can't be, because it must either be powerful enough to oppress others or it must be oppressed by others. If you lost your dominion, you would also lose your freedom and the city itself, which would be attacked, and you would lack the means to defend it. Being just, distributing offices well, having good laws that were well observed, these things wouldn't defend you. So I am of the opposite opinion to you in thinking the last topic is more important, because the others depend on it. If the dominion is lost, they collapse,<sup>199</sup> and the city remains subjugated and usurped, with no hope of ever being able to rise again. This does not happen if the other parts are in disorder, because the city suffers but does not die. As long as life remains, so does the hope of being able to get going again one day; this is what the rulers of republics always have to think about in serious situations, that is, putting up with every hardship to prevent the city from being extinguished. If you think about it hard, you and every other intelligent person like you, none of you will ever talk any differently from me.

<sup>199</sup> *restano in terra*; A: 'are extinguished'.

**SODERINI** I don't want to interrupt you now, but at the end of our discussion I will say what I think.

**BERNARDO** So I'll continue, following the order adopted by Piero Capponi. It is true what he said, that in deciding about campaigns and foreign affairs, the Medici aimed more at their own personal benefit than the greatness of the city. I affirm, however, what he tacitly admitted, that it was scarcely possible, indeed it wasn't possible, to have one without the other. For the Medici did not enjoy a lordship or a separate state<sup>200</sup> to give them greatness; everything they had depended on the power and reputation of the Florentine state.<sup>201</sup> Their prosperity and growth lay in its prosperity and growth, for the greater and more powerful the city became, the more powerful they became too. If Lorenzo did make any mistakes in his enterprises – and from Volterra on, he probably didn't (though we need not discuss this now) – it was due to bad advice, as happens sometimes to all wise men; it didn't happen because the city's hardship or poverty served his own interest. So despite being moved more by their personal interest than by the public interest, since it was difficult to procure their own interest if they did not also procure the public interest, the two became practically identical. Exactly the same was true, in this respect, of the status they attempted to appropriate for themselves and enjoy by being considered as patrons. For everyone enjoyed the same benefits brought to the citizens by the peace, the reputation and the safety of their homeland and the increase of its dominion.<sup>202</sup>

We are left with the last points raised by Piero Capponi, that is, their excessive expenditure on soldiers and on their friends, and the money that Lorenzo drew from public funds for himself and to benefit a few friends. This is the truth and I don't want to excuse it, although I could perhaps say he was reduced to extreme penury, and the situation was such that his collapse would inevitably have damaged the public interest, so he was advised<sup>203</sup> to do so by all the leading citizens. But let's agree it was a bad thing to do. Experience

<sup>200</sup> *stato appartato*. A adds: 'a state separated from that of the city'. See Glossary.

<sup>201</sup> *stato in questa città*.

<sup>202</sup> In a cancelled draft, A wrote: 'because everyone participated in the good that resulted from it: the power of your state and Lorenzo's authority made your merchants more respected abroad, their business was expedited on favourable terms and the affairs of private citizens benefited in many ways'.

<sup>203</sup> A adds 'vigorously', *vivamente*. This charge is discussed in the Introduction.

will show that all Lorenzo's excessive expenditure at that time, or what he helped himself to for his own needs and for those of his friends, was a small amount compared to what bad governments will spend in very few years, due to the carelessness of the treasurer and also to some nastiness. One ill-advised decision, one election of an incompetent Ten, one of your long delays or vacillations, one tax not granted in time, which will happen very often now they have to be approved by the Great Council:<sup>204</sup> all this will cause you to throw away more in a year<sup>205</sup> than was ever done in the whole of Lorenzo's time. A ducat spent by a bad government will harm the public as much as one spent for other reasons.<sup>206</sup> You will see how badly the revenue will be managed and how much carelessness and theft there will be, since from a government that lacks order and a firm boss nothing else can be expected.<sup>207</sup>

At the end, if I remember right, Piero Capponi complained about suspicion and the results it produces, that is, constricting the growth of men of excellence, breaking off marriage relationships between suitable<sup>208</sup> people, keeping a close watch on other people's movements, especially those of men who are talented, distrusting not least his own friends and intimates. All these things are very true, and they are essential to every tyranny; but in tyrannies that are inhuman, the measures adopted are cruel,<sup>209</sup> because they are carried out with the sword. You see what is done in our day in Bologna and in Perugia; in these cases, I praise those who choose every other alternative than that of staying in their native city. Where they are more temperate, the measures are more skilful, using the methods that Piero criticised.

<sup>204</sup> The Medici had removed approval of tax bills from the Councils of the People and of the Commune, where they were often rejected, to the more selected Council of One Hundred, but now they had to be approved by a two-thirds majority in the Great Council.

<sup>205</sup> A: 'six months'.

<sup>206</sup> A adds: 'You have hanged, or rather, allowed to be hanged, Antonio di Bernardo, who was among the [most] useful ministers this commune has ever had, totally honest, extremely diligent and most amiable'; cf. note 207 below. On Antonio Dini's position as Proveditor of the Monte, 'with so much power he could be said to control two-thirds of Florence', and his death by hanging in 1494, see *History of Florence*, pp. 67, 75, 87, 93, 102.

<sup>207</sup> A adds: 'so that the times that follow will even see Antonio di Bernardo adored and everyone confessing that the communal monies were incomparably better conserved in those days than they will be by this other regime'.

<sup>208</sup> *qualificati*.

<sup>209</sup> A adds 'that is, murdering and seeing that suspects are murdered'.

Lorenzo behaved like this, managing to protect himself from suspects without shedding blood or exiling people. I don't praise the way he broke off marriage relationships, nor his holding back anyone who was getting ahead,<sup>210</sup> especially the people of most worth. But I do say that in comparison with the evils mentioned above, it was, after all, a small evil because it affected very few and those mildly.

I don't want to talk of the Pazzi business now, because their desire to compete too openly with the Medici in Rome and their arrogance in Florence forced Lorenzo to think of reducing their status, and he chose those methods in preference to drawing blood. For this he deserved to be praised perhaps more for his clemency than for his prudence, since he exasperated them and failed to safeguard himself. Let me say that your Council, too, will have malcontents and people who will seek change and sedition. It would be much better to defend itself with Lorenzo's diligence and skill than to act as people naturally tend to do, that is, not to notice small and quite hidden happenings, or if they do notice, to do nothing about it. So that those who want to plot take heart; and with growing licence every day, they eventually either succeed in their designs or, when things have reached<sup>211</sup> their most dangerous point, measures are taken but with blood and fury. Where a little diligence would have sufficed, axes and the block have to be used,<sup>212</sup> with infinite harm to those who suffer them and with incomparably greater distress to the city and everybody than Lorenzo's measures would have caused.

There are a lot of other things I could say and I could reply in greater detail to the many points raised by you two, Piero and Pagolantonio. But I won't bother since it's not really necessary; I have touched on the substantial points and I don't want to go on indefinitely. That's enough, for I'm not sure if the popular government will cause the city to feel particularly obliged to those who have expelled the Medici. I confess there were many things that weren't good and were displeasing about their regime, and which people found difficult to tolerate. But there will also be many in this other regime, perhaps even more, and more serious. Men shouldn't get out of one regime to escape things they don't like, except to find another where, on balance, the conditions will be better. The purpose

<sup>210</sup> A adds 'too much'.

<sup>211</sup> A: 'on the point of reaching'.

<sup>212</sup> i.e. death sentences, or executions.

of revolutions is not to flee from men's names and faces, to change a stomach-ache for a headache: they are to escape from their effects and to be liberated from the evils that afflict you without entering others equally bad or perhaps worse.

**SODERINI** I think your arguments are splendid, but I am afraid they suffer from a fallacy. In order to examine both of these regimes, you have on one hand based yourself on Lorenzo's method of government, which was the best, the most intelligent and the most pleasing one could expect from such a government; and on the other hand, on the beginning of the popular regime, which is still rough and in a state of confusion and disorder, almost as bad as it can be. The Medici regime was set to deteriorate every day, as we have seen from Piero's behaviour. He was becoming hourly more repressive and his henchmen were growing increasingly insolent and licentious, so that in a few years it would have become totally different from what it was in Lorenzo's day. This other new regime will become better ordered as every day passes, because men long for freedom and for the city to be governed quietly and peacefully. So the mistakes that are now being made in fury – partly through necessity, partly through suspicion and ignorance – will be recognised after the experience of a few years,<sup>213</sup> and they will be modified and corrected to allow no room for the defects there would be if the government continued as it is now. The benefits of the Medici regime wouldn't have lasted, either, for it was getting worse every day.

**BERNARDO** If the situation were as Pagolantonio says, he would in a few words have destroyed everything I have laboured at such length to prove. However, I don't think it is. I don't think either that things under Piero would have deteriorated as much as he believes or that this popular government will have improved so much after a few years.

Although the Medici regime, as I've said, was a tyranny and the Medici were bosses of the whole show, since everything was done according to their will, nevertheless it had not reached the point of being like the regime of an absolute prince.<sup>214</sup> For it was accompanied with free and civilised procedures, being still governed under the

<sup>213</sup> A: 'partly through necessity, partly because this new regime will lack men who are experienced'.

<sup>214</sup> *principe assoluto*.



name of a republic and by means of magistracies.<sup>215</sup> Although the latter did what they were told, nevertheless in behaviour and image the government appeared to be free. And just as the attempt was made to satisfy the mass of the citizens through the distribution of offices, so they had to satisfy the leading citizens by giving them not only the most important honours but also the management of the most important affairs; thus public and private consultative meetings were held about everything. And although the Medici had established themselves so firmly in terms of arms and supporters that, if they had wanted to seize absolute control of the city, they could have done so without any difficulty, nevertheless if they had done so, they would have driven everyone to total despair, their friends as much as the others – and even our subjects in the dominion, who are used to recognising the authority of the Florentine Signoria<sup>216</sup> and its free procedures, would have been displeased. So none of the Medici would ever have done this unless he had been a certified lunatic, since they were able to preserve their authority without taking a step that would have certainly alienated everyone. Had they done so, they would have to have been prepared either to leave Florence at the slightest provocation, or to rely totally on arms and force. To base one's rule entirely on violence when able to stay in power by a mixture of love and force is something tyrants should never do unless forced to it. One should add that anyone who deprived our city of its civilised life and its image of freedom and reduced it to the form of a principate would deprive it of its life and soul, weakening it and crushing it totally. As the city becomes weaker and less powerful, so the man who is its master becomes weaker and less powerful. So if the Medici had assumed an absolute principate,<sup>217</sup> they would have decreased and not increased their power and reputation. There can be no doubt that none of the Medici, unless he had been a public lunatic, would have thought of such a transgression. Although we all know Piero's nature and hot-headedness, you'll have to admit that he was not so feckless as to suggest he would ever have attempted anything as mad as that.

What do you infer from this? I infer that this practice of discussing matters with the leading citizens and using magistracies to execute

<sup>215</sup> Cf. Appendix, Maxim 21.

<sup>216</sup> 'the Palace'; A: 'this Palace'.

<sup>217</sup> *el principato assoluto*.

them acted, in no small measure, as a brake on the excesses the Medici might have wanted to commit. Not that this would have sufficed to prevent them doing what they had absolutely resolved to do, but it served to hold them back and show them the better path. With these procedures, it almost seemed to them wrong to depart from the counsel of those they considered wise and their friends; and they went on holding the opinion that it was good to behave in a way that satisfied the city, or at least the regime. So until we had found ourselves faced with a total madman, there was I believe no fear of departing too far from the way of life of Lorenzo's day, and even less in the management of internal affairs than in foreign ventures and friendships with rulers, which he thought should legitimately depend more on his own arbitrary decision. So if you think about it carefully, the constraints that Lorenzo had introduced were more to do with his wanting the citizens to be franker about acknowledging that<sup>218</sup> they owed their reputation to him, than they were to do with his upsetting the judicial or the legal system, or with taxing their wealth more heavily than was customary, and the other matters relating to a good and peaceful way of life. On the contrary, these in fact were helped by the authority he restricted to himself, since it meant he did not have to tolerate incompetence in the leading citizens – something that neither Cosimo nor his father Piero had been successful in doing, for being less firmly established than Lorenzo, they had to suffer constant blackmail from a few leading citizens who enjoyed great authority.

Don't you realise how Florence was governed from 1434, and especially after Cosimo became old and infirm, until the time when Lorenzo began to establish himself, and how much more secure and less oppressed everyone felt after this time than before? For all his habits and his nature, Piero did not upset the judicial system and the citizens' peace and quiet. Nor did I ever know him to be so bestial by nature that one had to fear he would upset and ruin the city's way of life. The things that gave him a bad name during his father's lifetime were no more than the hot-headed exploits of youth, which one sees every day in someone of his age and enjoying much less licence than he did – they were not such as to remove the hope that, when older, he wouldn't have had the required maturity and pru-

<sup>218</sup> A: 'to depend more openly on him and to acknowledge that ...'

dence. Anyone who considers carefully his behaviour after the death of his father, that is, in governing the state, won't find any signs of cruelty or bloodthirstiness alien to our customs. What shows this more clearly than affairs of Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco, and of Cosimo Rucellai and perhaps Bernardo, who were plotting against the regime and Piero, and yet were dealt with pleasantly?<sup>219</sup> I confess that here the counsel of the leading members of the regime carried considerable weight, since Piero had been launched on a bad path by one or two people; but had he been bloodthirsty by nature or implacable, he would not have let himself be persuaded by us.<sup>220</sup> And if you deny this, you must agree with me that, as I said above, the system of government was such that it was easy to be restrained from corrupt behaviour. So I repeat that I don't think Piero was about to lead us towards these ultimate disasters that Pagolantonio spoke of.

And if he ripostes that had the regime continued, one day one of them – if not Piero – might have been so imprudent as to do what we feared Piero would do, my response would be as follows. Apart from the obstacles provided by the government to prevent this happening, I was talking about our present situation and the situation we would find ourselves in for several decades; I hadn't indeed taken it upon myself to talk about infinity, because one can't hope for perpetuity in a regime and in the greatness of a family. Moreover, the same danger exists with a popular government, because when things get disordered and reach a state of total licentiousness, it too suffers the same 'ultimate disasters', as you know better than me and as plenty of examples illustrate. And if this is difficult, which I don't now want to discuss, I certainly don't admit, as Pagolantonio said, that your government will easily improve its present condition, honing

<sup>219</sup> Lorenzo and Giovanni de' Medici were Piero's second cousins once-removed; for conspiring, through Cosimo di Bernardo Rucellai, with Lodovico il Moro in Milan, they were simply banished to their villa in Castello on 29 April 1494, while Cosimo was declared a rebel. See *History of Florence*, pp. 86–7. On Bernardo as 'a sort of negative hero' in the *History* and the *Idealtypus* of restless ambition, see G. Sasso, *Per Francesco Guicciardini, Quattro Studi*, Rome, 1984, pp. 73 and 170.

<sup>220</sup> In the *History* (above), Guicciardini says that although Piero was 'malissimo disposto' towards his cousins, the leading citizens did not want their hands bloodied and so exiled them to their estates, whereas Tommaso Ginori states in his *Ricordanze* that it was Piero who reversed the Council of Seventy's recommendation on 28 April that the brothers should be imprisoned for life, asking instead for their pardon. See J. Schnitzer, ed., *Quellen u. Forschungen zur Geschichte Savonarolas*, vol. 1, Munich, 1902, p. 94.

GUICCIARDINI So do you want Piero to return?

BERNARDO I will speak freely and unemotionally. I wish Piero had not been driven out, because I don't see that anything was gained by this revolution. Now he has been expelled, I don't want him to return. For apart from not believing that any revolution ever benefited the city, things would have reached the point where they would have got vastly worse. Piero cannot return without the use of force and foreign armies, unless thanks to your divisions he should already have been recalled by one party; in fact, to succeed, both would most probably have to happen together. If it was by means of foreign forces, it could not but bring great shame and damage to the city, as well as the danger of losing part of our dominion. If by means of your divisions, they will have to have tormented the city quite a lot before reaching the point of bringing this about. But apart from the way his return came about, which would inevitably be damaging and shameful, how could his return have other than bad consequences? The desire for revenge against all or some of those who have damaged him, the determination to ensure he could not be expelled again, poverty – since he has been plundered and his wealth and possessions falling into ruin, as they increasingly will be, the longer he stays away – all these things would force him to drive out and destroy many families and do an infinite amount of damage, putting the regime on a different course from its original one.

No one should think that Piero could return and restore the government to what it was before. He would make it more dependent on him; he would rely more on arms and force, he would destroy the customary way of doing things, which is what preserves Florence; and seeing that the support of his friends was not enough to keep him in the city, nor the hatred of his enemies enough keep him out, he would not make any capital out of the citizens' affection, nor would he be frightened of hatred, since he would set out to crush it. If under a tyranny nothing can damage a city more than giving the tyrant cause for suspicion, which forces him to be totally corrupt, think what happens when someone returns who is certain of the enmity of the people: apart from what he has experienced of it with his own eyes, he also has the desire for revenge.<sup>224</sup> May God protect

<sup>224</sup> A: 'and revenging himself he creates a lot of exiles, which is one of the most pernicious sores a city can have'.

## *Dialogue on the government of Florence*

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others to follow your advice, since this is one of the things that causes great citizens to be suspected and quite hated by the people. But what am I doing giving advice to you when you are considerably more able than I am? Love, not presumption, has carried me away. So you must forgive me. And because it must be supper time by now, let's – if you agree – conclude our discussion for tonight. If there is more to say, we could continue tomorrow morning, since in any case you cannot leave without meeting again.

CAPPONI Well said, both as far as tonight and tomorrow morning are concerned. Let's have supper.

SODERINI Let's go.

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## Book II

### THE SAME SPEAKERS

**BERNARDO** The nights are so long and the old normally sleep so little, that I have had several hours in which to turn over yesterday's discussion in my mind. The more I have thought about it, the truer many of the things I said to you seem to me to be. Yet because I could easily deceive myself, I would be pleased to hear your opinion<sup>228</sup> – though not to argue with you if you disagree with me, since such a debate would be tedious, in view of the fact that the subject-matter, both what was discussed yesterday and what you will add today, is clear enough.<sup>229</sup> In any case you must dine here, so we have plenty of time. Don't be any more sparing with me than I was with you: I will listen to you willingly and even, if anything relevant occurs to me, ask you questions.

**CAPPONI** Our opinion must be known to you even without our speaking, because if we had thought the city would be better off under this power, Pagolantonio wouldn't have urged Piero de' Medici to moderate it on Lorenzo's death, and I wouldn't then have worked so hard to expel him. There were things each of us disliked, but they weren't a matter of life or death, nor such as to make us risk so much

<sup>228</sup> A adds: 'I say you, Piero Capponi and Pagolantonio, because I know that Piero Guicciardini won't want to let himself be understood.'

<sup>229</sup> A adds 'rather than useful or likely to change anyone's mind'.

that, with time and the occasions it presents, many things will be moderated sufficiently to reduce the disorders to tolerable proportions. So that weighing the defects of both regimes, this new one will be the one we should love much more<sup>232</sup> – apart from the fact that, as Pagolantonio said, freedom matters so much that one doesn't feel so much the hardships of a government of this kind and tolerates them willingly. Since cities were founded and survive for no other reason than for the benefit of their inhabitants, which is based principally in preserving the common good, this cannot be restricted to one particular person or individual except at the expense of all the others. So what, I ask you, could be more pernicious or contrary to the essence of a city than for one part of it to be, quite unjustly and for no reason, excluded from all or part of the public benefits and consequently made to suffer greater disadvantages and burdens more than the other?

The greatest bond that unites a city, more useful and necessary than any other, is the citizens' benevolence towards each other, and when this is lacking, the very foundation of civil society is lacking. But when one sees a part of it unjustly oppressed by the other, hatred and incalculable bad feeling are inevitably born. So if Lorenzo and the Medici family elevated part of the city and debased the other, I admit it was unavoidable, since all narrow regimes have to do this, in order to avoid suspicion and acquire partisans. But it was one of the worst things that could have been done to the city, since it transformed into a private good what should have been universal, and incited hatred where there should have been love. Nor is the argument of necessity sufficient excuse, indeed the opposite is true, when leaders are forced to behave badly. The popular government won't have this failing, since no one will be ruled out or attacked for being the son of so-and-so and the grandson of those other people.

One of the principal fruits to be derived from good government is security for one's person and one's possessions, and the ability to dispose of them as one wants. How is it possible to have this under a government where you are prevented from marrying whom you want, where you are overwhelmed by taxes imposed by the arbitrary decision of others, where you are afraid that in civil lawsuits you will be deprived of justice through favouritism, where you daren't spit in

<sup>232</sup> *amare*; see Glossary under *amorevole*.

church, as the popular proverb says, for fear of being unfairly condemned, exiled or beaten up? And even if these things don't happen, it is miserable to see oneself in the power of someone who can make them happen. Nor can anyone feel fully secure who has to rely on the goodwill of others, for true security consists in enjoying a state of affairs where one citizen cannot be injured or hurt by another.

These evils do not arise in a free regime, because no one forces you, no one punishes you unjustly. Perhaps we shall quite often see someone absolved of a criminal offence who should be punished, but it will be extremely rare to see anyone punished who is not guilty. And in civil actions, provided I see no one so grand that he can command and be feared by others, I don't expect there'll be any frequent or notorious miscarriages of justice due to favouritism. There's no doubt, either, that criminals had far more redress before than at present, because in the countryside they'll no longer be protected by the person who wanted to keep it full of partisans, and the friendship of particular citizens won't be enough, for if it works on one occasion, it won't on another.<sup>233</sup> And even if crimes should multiply, thanks to the considerations and inactivity<sup>234</sup> of the magistrates, they will be so hateful to people that some severe method of judging them will have to be thought out to deal with the problem.<sup>235</sup>

I don't want to go painstakingly over all the details, nor to weigh up the conditions of one government with the other. But because the main basis of your argument seems to have been that, as far as preserving and expanding the dominion is concerned, things will never be dealt with as well as they were in the days of the Medici, I would agree that they were probably more vigilant and examined things better than is done at present. But I also believe that the need to consider their personal security and their own particular situation made them take many decisions that were not right for someone who only had the good of the city at heart. For in deciding whether to embark on enterprises or forgo them, to form friendships or not, they put their own interests first, and on this account they were involved

<sup>233</sup> i.e. as the magistrates change.

<sup>234</sup> *rispetti e freddezza*.

<sup>235</sup> In a long cancelled passage, A says that the situation of a city can never be compared with that of a private person, since the latter considers only his advantage, whereas a city considers 'honour, magnificence and majesty; because a city is a public affair [*cosa publica*] to which generosity and amplitude are more fitting than utility'.



in huge expenses and lots of activities that were not appropriate to the city's welfare.<sup>236</sup> Although its greatness came from theirs, there were certain small clauses and secret points on which the cliques and clienteles of the tyranny relied, and of which they had to take account, which further damaged the city when they were inevitably discovered. When it is free, its strength lies in being more united, bolder and more uninhibited in pursuing its interests, nor will it suffer from those weaknesses and suspicions that necessarily delayed and complicated every activity and every decision about war and peace in the Medici regime.

You can see that from 1434 onwards, they scarcely increased our dominion at all – for all that Cosimo was the wisest of men, as everyone admits, and Lorenzo too had the reputation for being wise, and for all that the city's fame and power had increased so much after acquiring Pisa, that expansion reasonably seemed easier than it had been before. The explanation for this can only be that before the Medici, all the city's prowess, all its vigour<sup>237</sup> in the field of foreign affairs, was devoted to its greatness. Thinking they were acting for themselves, the citizens were bolder in agreeing to help their native city with money and with everything they could. Thus they increased the dominion and in times of crisis and serious danger were very successful in defending their freedom and honour; whereas afterwards we have scarcely increased it at all and we have lost reputation and standing in every little<sup>238</sup> war. So if we're lucky and the popular regime doesn't collapse into disorder but remains even moderately well established, I would think that what it lacks in diligence and steady vigilance will be balanced by these other counterweights – sufficiently at least to retain what our fathers bequeathed us. Even if this is all we can manage, it will be quite something to preserve this and enjoy freedom, which will bring the city much more honour and the citizens more contentment and enjoyment. I certainly find it difficult to believe that this popular government will reduce us to such disorder that we will be incapable of defending ourselves and finding appropriate cures for the defects that will emerge every day. For everyone will love the common good, and once this liberty has

<sup>236</sup> B: 'situation'.

<sup>237</sup> *virtù . . . nervo.*

<sup>238</sup> *mediocre.*

been tasted, it will be more beloved and held more dearly every day. If we decided to arm ourselves, as Pagolantonio has suggested – and as our fathers used to be, though the Medici regime couldn't accept it – we would be all the bolder. But what do you think?

**BERNARDO** It's so obvious that being armed with your own arms is not only useful and the way to preserve yourselves but also the route to achieving excessive power, that there is no need to prove it. It is demonstrated by the examples of ancient republics – and even by your own, for as long as it was armed, despite being full of faction and a thousand disorders, it always struck hard at our neighbours and laid the foundations of the dominion<sup>239</sup> that we possess, surviving the conditions of those times safely and with great reputation. The power and valour<sup>240</sup> that arms would give you, if well organised, would not only counterbalance the disorders I fear this open government will bring, they would greatly outweigh them; for whoever has arms in his own hands does not have to rely so much on vigilance and the hard work of consultative meetings.

But if you were to ask me, do you think we could or should do it, there is no doubt about our ability, since we could certainly do now what our forebears did and what many cities and provinces still do.<sup>241</sup> What I fear is that the difficulties and impediments will be so numerous that either we won't do it, or if we do, our arms won't achieve the standard of perfection to enable us to profit from them. Our city, as everyone knows, used to be armed and undertook its exploits with the arms of its own citizens and its subjects, enjoying so many victories and glorious successes that it should have been encouraged to devote itself entirely to the exercise of arms instead of disarming itself. Nevertheless – lest they are wrongly blamed for this – it was long before the Medici got power that the city gave up arming its citizens and began to employ mercenary soldiers to fight their wars. This change must have been due either to the people's oppression of the nobility, who enjoyed considerable standing and prestige in

<sup>239</sup> A: *stato*.

<sup>240</sup> *virtù*.

<sup>241</sup> On the debate over the Florentine militia, see Guicciardini, *History of Florence*, pp. 257–8; Pesman Cooper, 'Machiavelli, Francesco Soderini and Don Michelotto', *Nuova Rivista Storica*, 66 (1982), pp. 343–57, esp. pp. 350–3. The law of 6 December 1506 established a militia drawn from *contadini* outside the city, not from the citizens, in Machiavelli, ed. S. Bertelli, *Arte della Guerra*, pp. 101–15; cf. note 244.

develop the enterprise. This requires superiors who are enthusiastic and prepared to learn their job, otherwise the militia will be no more than a sketch, without a proper foundation and without muscle. No part of it will be fit to use, indeed, it could be harmful to put it to serious use before it had attained a certain level of perfection. I don't know whether such things can easily succeed now, in a state like this one, where men change every day and those responsible for one thing must take into account a thousand considerations – especially since we are dealing with a venture that many detest and others condemn with faint praise, and whose fruits are not apparent in a day but only in the course of many years. So to be well organised and exercised only on one occasion is not enough, unless its good beginnings can be continued. Indeed, since its potential merits can't be seen so quickly, as time goes on it will lose rather than gain favour in men's opinion, because the ignorant tend to consider things on a day-to-day basis, and it will undergo constant changes. If by ill luck it suffers some misfortune initially, it will be impossible to maintain support for it among the ignorant. So even if it were in itself the most useful thing imaginable, I fear that since it can't be conducted without diligence and excellent administration, sustained over a long period, it would be extremely difficult to get it to achieve its target successfully – due not to the nature of the thing itself as much as to men's negligence and incompetence. And don't quote the Romans to me, where military discipline was extremely flourishing under a popular and tumultuous type of government. For the Roman army was created and developed under the kings, so when the city became free, it was not difficult, or something new, to maintain a profession which had nourished the city for hundreds of years already – and which, it can be said, was a common one, since all the peoples of Italy were armed.

Nor for this reason would I be against trying it out. For provided one ensured that disobedience didn't become a problem in creating disorder, even if the rest wasn't successful, nothing would be lost. And unless we've already used it all up, perhaps the city's fortune would make the task easier than one might think – provided, as I've said, it was established so that one could be certain that it wouldn't create disturbances. This should not be difficult, as long as one was careful to introduce it – especially in Florence – at a suitable time. Otherwise, unless it was firmly instituted it would be a means of attempting to prove all the possible evils of such a system, without

the hope of enjoying any of its advantages. But let's revert to what we were talking about earlier, if you like, since as I said a short time ago, I want to be here to listen, not to contradict.<sup>246</sup>

**SODERINI** Rather than add anything, I'd prefer to reinforce what Piero Capponi and I said yesterday, and what he has said this morning. Indeed, as he said, if we are lucky enough not to collapse into total confusion – as I hope – there'll be enough order to preserve our regime; and the other things, that is, our domestic affairs, will in my opinion go much better, so everyone in all walks of life will be incomparably more satisfied. The men of more outstanding talent, who savour more than the others the taste of true honour and glory, will have greater freedom and opportunity to demonstrate their worth and put it to use. I set store by this, not to satisfy or foment their ambition, but for the benefit of the city. For if one examines carefully the course of all history, ancient and modern, one finds it is always the virtue of a few people that counts, for only a few are capable of such elevated deeds, and they are the ones gifted by nature with more intelligence and judgement than the others. Such men, when they find themselves in a regime where it is not permitted or necessary to aim at dominance and tyrannical authority, all devote themselves to attaining glory and true honour, which consists entirely in doing generous and praiseworthy deeds to benefit and exalt their native city and be useful to other citizens, sparing themselves neither hard work nor danger.

A careful reading of Greek and Roman history, as well as our own chronicles, will show that in every ordered political society the weight of the city rests upon the shoulders of such men, who in every age are few; great and glorious undertakings have never been initiated and carried out by anyone else. To encourage and facilitate these men to use their abilities to the good is surely a public benefit; to force them to hide their worth or turn it to bad use on the contrary does great damage. Everything depends on this new government enjoying good fortune or brains enough to be able to moderate itself sufficiently not to fall into chaos. I dearly hope that this will happen, and that with help principally from God, who loves liberty, and then

<sup>246</sup> A adds that Piero and Paolantonio should continue; he only wants to listen, since he does not think that arguing with each other will bear much fruit now, corrected from 'would only be annoying' and 'for if you're not moved by what I said at length yesterday, I don't know what else to say'.

from the many men of worth and prudence there are in this city, it will be launched on a good path. If this were to happen, we should enjoy a way of life such as perhaps has never been known in Florence.<sup>247</sup>

Let me explain better what I have attempted to say before. I believe that for a city to be happy, one must consider not only whether it is governed justly without anyone being oppressed, so that men can enjoy their own things with security, but also whether it has a government that gives it dignity and splendour. For thinking solely about profit and being able to enjoy one's own things with security is a private matter rather than one befitting the public interest, where one should have regard for honour, magnificence and majesty, giving more consideration to generosity and breadth of spirit than to utility. For although cities were founded principally to protect those who took refuge in them and to provide them with the commodities of everyday life, nevertheless their rulers are also responsible for making them magnificent and illustrious, so their inhabitants can acquire reputation and fame among other nations for being generous, intelligent, virtuous and prudent. Security and commodities serve solely to benefit private citizens as individuals, an objective that is much lower and more abject than befits the nobility of a community of so many men considered as a whole. For this reason writers say that in private individuals, humility, parsimony and modesty are praised, but in public affairs it is generosity, magnificence and splendour that are praiseworthy.<sup>248</sup>

So when you say that political writers haven't aimed at providing cities with political freedom but have been more concerned about which produced the best results – so that one-man government when good is preferable to all the others – I would think this might be true of cities built or instituted right from the start, for the better the government, whatever its type, the more security, commodities and honour it produces. But when a city has already enjoyed freedom and made a profession of it, so to be free can be said to be its natural condition, then whenever it is reduced to the control of one man, not of its own free will or choice but through violence, and continues

<sup>247</sup> A adds in a cancelled passage that it would be good to hear Piero Guicciardini's opinion, which he would like, and which he imagined 'Bernardo and Pagolantonio [Piero Capponi?]' would too; cf. p. 94.

<sup>248</sup> Cf. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, bk. II, ch. 2.

in this state, this cannot happen without blotting its reputation and making it infamous in the eyes of others. For inevitably one thinks either that these citizens are of little account, or that there must be many bad types among them, since they tolerate or encourage their native city, against its wishes, to lie beneath the yoke. The dignity of the city consists in its freedom, since the city is preserved under a government the citizens love warmly and is lost when they are forced to live under one they dislike.

So think of<sup>249</sup> the disgrace to our own city – which has always called itself free and among all the other cities of Italy has made a special profession of liberty, to preserve which our fathers, grandfathers and other ancestors have spent so much and endured so many dangers – the disgrace, I say, of understanding that it was reduced to the arbitrary power of one private citizen, and to have come to this not through its own desire, but partly through being suffocated by his riches, partly bullied by his hangers-on and partisans! How shameful to have made public to the whole of Italy, to the whole world, that so noble, so honourable, so generous a city as ours, once renowned everywhere for its subtle intellects, was enslaved against its will and reduced to such shame and worthlessness as to be kept in servitude not by armies, not by heavy guards, but by twenty-five lackeys! Siena, for all its madness, is not so cheaply enslaved. I don't know what calamity – apart from the extremes of sack, fire and the sword – could befall a city equal to this: to lose its honour, reputation and glory, and to allow itself to be shamefully and cheaply deprived of the dignity and the splendour that cost us such treasure, so many lives to acquire.

So when in order to discover which was better in Florence, the government of the Medici or this free government, you discussed which produced the better results, and from this stipulated which was better, I think you should also have considered this argument<sup>250</sup> concerning the dignity and honour of the city. I admit that where the effects of one and the other government were extremely disproportionate, one should make one's judgement according to your criteria; but where in other matters they were not so different, it seems to me that this argument counts for so much that I would always call free

<sup>249</sup> lit. 'tell me'; A: 'to admit the truth to each other', *per dire tra noi la verità*.

<sup>250</sup> B: *ragione*, A: *capo*.

government incomparably better for Florence, where it is loved and the government of narrow regimes is loathed. But it would perhaps be a good idea if Piero Guicciardini, who up to now has only asked questions, told us his opinion, since this would not only give me the greatest pleasure but you too, I think.

GUICCIARDINI When we've dealt with everything raised at the beginning of our discussion, I will willingly say what occurs to me, in order to satisfy you. But I think it would be better now to pursue the path we have begun instead of wasting time unnecessarily, especially since I think everything that can possibly be said for and against each of the two regimes has already been said – or at least the most important things. As far as I have understood, Bernardo confesses that there were many defects in the Medici government and he thinks there will be many in this other one – and I doubt if you deny much of what he says. So we are not disputing, I think, which of these two regimes is better but which is the least bad. Thus it remains to discover, as was said at the beginning, which would be a good government for this city; and having declared it to be this one, it's now the turn of Bernardo, who was then asked for his opinion and accepted the undertaking. If he agrees to do this in every respect, we shall finish our discussion most profitably, since not only will we know that this and that one is bad, but also which would be good. So, Bernardo, we are all waiting for you to tackle this question.

SODERINI Indeed.

CAPPONI We all beseech you!

BERNARDO I lost my shame when I agreed to begin the discussion, so I've no good excuse left now. And to tell you the truth, although this responsibility is too heavy for my shoulders, the great pleasure I derive from your having to stay longer with me makes it seem lighter.

As was said at the beginning, philosophers, supported by natural reason, argue that the government of the one, when good, is the best of all; and they call it good when the person most capable of governing is preferred to all the others – something that in our times one can desire more easily than one can hope to happen. Because usually principates and the 'big men' in modern cities<sup>251</sup> arise either through disorder, or through the use of arms, or assisted by factionalism, ways

<sup>251</sup> *le grandezze moderne*, explained by A: *le grandezze nelle città libere, cioè le autorità straordinarie*.

ing into either a tyranny or popular licentiousness. So I think this government of the *ottimati* is the worst our city could have, worse even than government by one man, for it would share all the evils that spring from being violent, plus all those born of civil conflicts and faction. If the head of the state is one man, it could quite easily happen that by nature he has no desire to do any more harm than necessity forces him to do; whereas it is quite impossible that among the *ottimati* there won't be someone who goes beyond what is necessary to commit many of those evils that men do by their own free choice, especially through greed.

That leaves us with popular government to consider. Since it's our own and natural to us, one hopes that it can be established to function well, especially since – despite all the tyrannies and narrow governments this city has had in the past – the ancient basis of our liberties has never been eroded; on the contrary it has been preserved as though the city had always been free: this is the citizens' equality, which is the ground absolutely most suited to receive liberty. But it shouldn't perhaps be difficult to discover how to found and establish popular governments, since ancient books by excellent political writers are full of examples. They contain information about the institutions and laws of many republics, from all of which we could either copy the best, or adopt from each of them the most notable and outstanding parts. Certainly, if anyone had to provide a new constitution<sup>253</sup> for a city born now or had a city ready to receive all the institutions one gave it, or for any speaker needing to show only that he was informed and knowledgeable about political affairs, the books referred to above are the place to go to, in order to find a solution to the problem of good government; anyone who departed from them would arrogate too much to himself.

But I'm not sure if it is right for us to proceed in this way, since we are not speaking simply to impress and to no purpose, but we are hopeful that our discussion can still be of some use. Nor are we planning to legislate for a city ready to receive the ordinances that were provided; instead it has to be led to what is good for it by means of persuasion. For this reason we shouldn't look for an imaginary government that is more likely to appear in books than in practice, perhaps like Plato's republic. Instead, after considering the nature,

<sup>253</sup> *forma*.



the quality, the conditions, the inclinations – in a word, the humours – of the city and its citizens, we must look for a government that we are reasonably confident could be introduced by persuasion, and once introduced, could be tolerated and preserved according to our own tastes – following the example of doctors who, although freer than we are in being able to give the sick all the medicines they like, nevertheless don't give them everything that's good and recommended, but only what the invalid is capable of tolerating according to his own constitution and other factors.

Many ordinances would be good, and perhaps necessary, in a popular government that it would be impossible to persuade people to accept in Florence, and even if one could, they wouldn't survive long. Yet although we can't achieve everything we know to be good, we shouldn't for this reason waste valuable time hunting for the unobtainable or wearing ourselves out introducing a government that only partly fulfils our desiderata, since we cannot have everything. In short, we must consider what's most likely to take and concentrate on that, thinking less about all the good we might do than about what we are hopeful can be done.

I have discussed at length the defects I fear in your government, not so much to speak ill of it and execrate it as to show that, despite the city's fondness for liberty, it is not enough to have introduced a free regime, for it too can conceal many mistakes and disorders. It must be established in such a way that we can taste the fruits of liberty, otherwise it will be good and pleasing only in name, and in effect very often resemble a tyranny. For when a popular government intrudes on and dominates others, takes from those it should give to and gives to those it should take from, when it torments and persecutes without any cause someone who should enjoy security, allows itself to be carried away by suspicion and oversteps the bounds of justice: when a people does all these things and many others by departing from the right way of doing things and becomes too licentious, then in my view it isn't and shouldn't any longer call itself defender of one's country but its enemy and destroyer. Then it is no longer the subject and foundation of liberty, but a tyrant – and a tyrant who is all the more dangerous than those who make a profession of tyranny, just as men allow themselves to be all the more easily deceived by the sweetness of the name and title of 'liberty', which signifies for them justice and equality.

So one has to see that the government is not only popular but is also well ordered. This is why I have discussed the defects that worry me, in order to have the chance of thinking about correcting them. These are, principally, that important matters will come into the hands of a person incapable of deciding what to do or dealing with them, so the city will be badly advised and badly governed. The result of this will be that matters concerning the defence and expansion of our dominion will go badly, especially since there will be no one to take overall control and provide a firm rudder to steer them. Matters relating to justice won't go well either, partly through the inadequacy<sup>254</sup> of those in charge, partly because everyone will take each other's interests into consideration when they see no stable leader to protect them; and the passions and feelings of one's own family and friends<sup>255</sup> will count for a lot, because there will be little authority and respect, and the people's judgement won't count for much when it is seen to be undistinguished, thoughtless and unretentive.

These are the principal defects: anyone who cured them would have cured the major and most important part of the disorders that can arise. But it's difficult to find the right medicine, for it must manage to avoid hurting the head by treating the stomach – in other words, the provisions must avoid altering the substance of popular government, which is liberty; and by removing important decisions from the hands of people who don't understand them, they must avoid the risk of falling into or approaching a kind of tyranny by giving too much authority to any single individual. Whoever successfully achieves these objectives will have done most of what is required; and if in doing this it's impossible to achieve the exact mean without leaning a little towards one of the extremes, it will be a lesser evil to leave things slightly imperfect than to run the danger of returning to tyranny by trying to make them too perfect.

The principal foundation and the soul of the popular government is, as you have made it, the Great Council, that is, a universal council of all those who according to our laws are eligible to hold office in the city and who are old enough to participate, that is, they must be at least twenty-four years old.<sup>256</sup> This Council has to distribute all

<sup>254</sup> A: 'ignorance'.

<sup>255</sup> *de' suoi*.

<sup>256</sup> The law of 22–3 December 1494 creating the Great Council in fact fixed 29 years as the minimum age, but allowed for the election to it of 24 citizens aged 24; on

paid and honorary offices and dignities, with the exception of a few to be described, for which authority will for good reason be given to others. Moreover, all laws of every kind must receive final approval in this Great Council, which in effect must enjoy the position and authority of the prince in the city; and if capable of doing so, it should initiate all deliberations. But since everyone has to participate, as you see, apart from the difficulty one would have in convoking it all the time if it deliberated everything, weighty matters cannot be discussed in it because they wouldn't be secret or speedy, they wouldn't be examined properly or understood properly. In the ancient republics of Rome and Greece you can see that taking important decisions to this Council, which the ancients called a *contio* or assembly, created many disturbances and often brought about immense destruction of states.

The health of a invalid should not be placed in the hands of an unskilled doctor, nor, because of its incompetence, should discussions or deliberations of any sort be placed in the hands of the people – apart from those which, if removed from its hands, might make liberty insecure. So for our purposes it is enough that the Great Council, which is tantamount to the people,<sup>257</sup> has the following conditions. Everyone eligible to hold office, that is, is a member of the city, should participate in the same way, since this will ensure equality, which is the first foundation for preserving liberty. It should distribute the dignities and all the offices, or almost all of them, in order to deprive any private individual or party of the means of bestowing honorary and paid offices – thus no one can use this as a means of making himself great, and no one will have reason to become an adherent of any private individual, since he can receive little honour or profit from him. No new laws should be made or old ones altered without the approval of this Council: I don't say 'deliberation' but 'approval', since the making of new laws or correction of old ones must be deliberated by more restricted Councils and shouldn't be presented to the people for consultation or discussion,

18 January 1497 all eligible youths of 24 years could attend the Council to make up the necessary quorum. See Cadoni, 'Leggi costituzionali' *Storia e politica*, 20 (1981), pp. 163 (§1), 170 (§18); vol. 23 (1984), p. 102 (§2).

<sup>257</sup> Cf. the law abolishing *parlamenti* on 13 August 1495: 'government having come into the hands of the people which is the true and legitimate lord of our city and can . . . make new laws without convoking the people', ed. in Italian by Cadoni, *Storia e politica*, 21 (1982), pp. 760–1.

since, as I've often said, they are incompetent. But none of these things can be done, of course, without popular approval, because this will not only restrain many individual desires, but as a new form of government can only be introduced in a free city through laws or by armed force, the road to revolutionary change by means of the laws will remain blocked, and provision will also be made against it being achieved by the use of force.

Having established the Great Council, which – as has been said – is the foundation of liberty and the popular regime, three things remain to be considered: the administration of justice, the defence of liberty (although this can almost be said to come under the former, in that there should be some quick and expeditious method of repressing anyone who plotted against the state), and how to manage important external as well as internal affairs.

Certainly, if the city could survive with a broadly-based regime, in which everyone participated equally in its affairs and its honours and the political offices and responsibilities circulated at given intervals equally among everyone, the government would perhaps be unjust, in that it would not differentiate between men's abilities and qualities, but it would, all the same, please most people and at least perhaps remove ambition. But since this is impossible, as not all men are fit to govern – on the contrary, most of them need governing – it is necessary to think of restricting important deliberations to fewer people. This is because on one hand the frequent change-over of offices is necessary and important to liberty, and on the other, men who are given responsibility for a short time are neglectful and fail to be as diligent as they should, so that important matters needing diligence and continual thought (one could say that everything to do with the government of a city is important) are ruined by oversight and neglect. It seems to me that here the Venetians have done better than perhaps any other republic ever in electing a Doge for life. He is prevented by their laws from threatening their liberty, yet being a fixture and having no other responsibilities, he gives thought to things and is informed about what is going on; and although he has no power to take decisions, since this would be dangerous to freedom, he provides a head to whom they can be referred and who always, in due course, offers suggestions and guidance.

With this example in mind, I would elect a Gonfalonier of Justice for life, restricting him as I shall describe in the course of our discus-

sion, to prevent him taking over our freedom or giving himself excessive authority that would quite reasonably upset others.<sup>258</sup> This, together with other regulations to be mentioned, would suffice to avoid the disorders caused by the frequent change-over of the other magistrates, who would continue to exchange offices as at present, since – as I have said – this is the foundation of freedom. Otherwise if you were reduced to appointing the Signoria, the Ten, the Eight<sup>259</sup> or other important magistracies with perpetual or long-term powers, you would open the way to tyranny; or at least they would be so powerful that, even if the Council was not removed, they couldn't plausibly be acceptable to a free regime. If the Gonfalonier was not appointed for life and these frequent change-overs continued as now, the Gonfalonier and members of the Signoria being in office for only two months, the Eight for four months, and the Dieci<sup>260</sup> for six months, important affairs would be dealt with in a disorderly and random way and chaos would ensue; because everyone in office only thinks about his period there – indeed, as the end draws near, he begins not to think about it at all, and at the beginning, he spends several days like a new bird.<sup>261</sup> This is why we need a boss or patron; he does not have to be a lord who rules, but someone who being a fixture will necessarily devote the thought and care to the city's affairs that bosses give to their own affairs; or to put it better, perhaps, he should be like a loving and faithful land-agent. The Romans and Spartans thought about this, but in my opinion their measures were not as successful as those of the Venetians. The Spartans instituted permanent kings by hereditary succession, appointing two of them; the Romans elected consuls, who were two in number and lasted for one year, which is too short a time to produce the effect I have described above.

**GUICCIARDINI** I was thinking about the Spartans and the Romans, too, and wondering whether their system was better thought out than the Venetians'. Leaving aside hereditary succession as being

<sup>258</sup> In fact a life Gonfalonier, Piero Soderini, was appointed for the first time in August 1502 after lengthy debates about this and the possibility of a new Council: see R. Pesman Cooper, 'L'elezione di Pier Soderini a gonfaloniere a vita', *Archivio storico italiano*, 125 (1967) pp. 145–85, cf. Butters, *Governors and Government*, pp. 44–45.

<sup>259</sup> The war magistracy of the Dieci di Balìa and the criminal magistracy of the Otto di Guardia.

<sup>260</sup> A adds 'when they are appointed' (since the Ten were appointed only in time of war).

<sup>261</sup> *uno ucello nuovo*.

hundreds of years already, as everyone knows, shows this cannot be attributed to fortune or chance. Many other factors demonstrate it too, which will emerge better in the course of our discussion. And although it has a different name from the one we want to use, because it's called a government of nobles and ours will be called a popular government, it is not for this reason of a different type, since it is simply a government in which everybody who is qualified for office participates, making no distinction either for wealth or for family, as happens when the *ottimati* rule, but all are equally admitted to everything, and they are very numerous – perhaps more so than in ours. And if the plebs don't participate, they don't in ours either, since infinite numbers of workers, newcomers to the city and others, do not belong to our Council. And although it is more difficult in Venice for the ineligible to be qualified for office than with us, this is not because the type of government is different, but because within the same type they have different institutions. For it is perfectly consistent to have identical governments but institutions that aren't always the same, as one can see from innumerable details – such as their ability to uphold the reputation of their government, and their magnificence in naming their citizens.<sup>263</sup> For although those who call themselves 'gentlemen' are no more than private citizens, anyone hearing the name is nevertheless dazzled and thinks them something greater than citizens. So if we were to call our citizens gentlemen and reserved this title for those who were qualified for office, you would find that the government of Venice is as 'popular' as ours and that ours is no less a government of optimates than theirs. Pagolantonio has twice served as ambassador to Venice and I think he'll say the same thing.

**SODERINI** Absolutely. And although overall they have more rich citizens than we do, there are also many who are poor. They don't admit the rich citizens to the government more than the others, nor does their wealth derive from any difference in government but rather from the great power of their dominion, and from the size of the city and the opportunities it offers.

**BERNARDO** The other common misapprehension is that their unity is a result of their site. I admit this is very useful in protecting the city from wars and foreign princes. However, it was placed where it

<sup>263</sup> On the influence of Venice as a model, see F. Gilbert, 'The Venetian Constitution in Florentine Political Thought', in *Florentine Studies: Politics and Society in Renaissance Florence*, ed. N. Rubinstein, London, 1968, pp. 463–500.

is by those who wanted to escape the barbarian invasions, and I think it contributed little or nothing to keeping it free of civil rebellions. For one reads in their histories that in the early days of the republic, before the government became firmly established, they experienced much discord and often resorted to the use of arms, yet it was on the same site as now. Nor in later times did they lack Doges and others who aspired to tyranny, but because of the government's good institutions they have been quickly suppressed.

It is difficult – indeed, it is almost impossible – for a private citizen to reduce a free city to slavery without having the support of some of the citizens themselves. In Venice it would be difficult for this to happen, since the government is normally liked by those who participate in it, and laws there are vigorous and well enough understood to put down anyone who might try to proceed along this path. These are the reasons for their concord, not the difficulty of using horses there. In revolutions foot soldiers are as useful as horses, and these can be used in Venice as elsewhere, and perhaps more easily, since to get them inside, by day or night, at least one does not need the keys of the gates.

So our popular government belongs to the same type as Venice's. The fact that we are land-based should make us more frightened than Venice of foreign enemies but not in despair of being able to institute it to avoid civil strife. So returning to the question in hand, I would prefer to have a life or long-term Gonfalonier rather than two or more, because giving a large number of people long-term authority opens the way to tyranny. Also, since we have to set up and organise our government so we won't have to fear the Gonfalonier, a single person will be freer to do the good for which he is elected, whereas two would easily compete and fight with each other, damaging the city more with their disagreements than benefiting it by their diligence. And if they had the chance of thinking about tyranny, two would perhaps be worse than one, since being united they would be more powerful and have more of a following.

At Rome, the Ten appointed to make the laws united to destroy freedom, despite being ten in number,<sup>264</sup> something which, as long as the republic remained uncorrupted, a dictator never thought of

<sup>264</sup> The Decemviri legibus scribundis, appointed in 451 and 450 BC to reform the laws; after their overthrow in 449 BC, the old constitution was restored before the Twelve Tables were issued that year.

doing. In the time of our grandfathers, the Eight of War were in full agreement to wage war against the Church to keep their office in being.<sup>265</sup> Nor am I convinced by the example of the Romans and the Spartans, because, as I understand it, it was not suspicion of tyranny that encouraged them to create two men, but partly necessity and partly utility. Necessity, because according to their laws the kings and the consuls had sole authority to do many things on their own without the agreement of<sup>266</sup> other magistrates or councils, and this was perhaps why they preferred to entrust such authority to two rather than one. But our Gonfalonier, like the Venetian Doge, does not enjoy any sole authority,<sup>267</sup> he is no more than a chairman or prior of the Signoria; since he can do nothing without the others, there is no need to give him other company apart from what he has. The utility I think was because according to those cities' constitutions, the two had to go on expeditions and lead armies. Since they were never able to abandon the government at home, they thought that if they had two heads, one could go to war, the other remain in the city. So when the expeditions weren't very important, or when there was only one war, one stayed inside, the other went out. If they had several wars on hand, both left to go on different expeditions. So this double number did not serve as a check or control on each other but enabled them to be in two places at once. It was always useful when they were apart but often destructive when they were together, whether inside or outside the city, on account of the disagreements which arose between them, which sometimes ruined their expeditions and often wasted marvellous opportunities. We don't need two, since apart from having more limited powers, ours have to stay put in the Palace, where one is quite sufficient; if there were two,<sup>268</sup> both would do worse.

We must now consider what's better: to appoint the Gonfalonier for life, or for one year. To appoint him for life<sup>269</sup> involves several difficulties, for the three reasons touched on by Piero Guicciardini:

<sup>265</sup> The Otto di Balìa, called the Eight Saints, were appointed in 1375 to fight the Church, but despite constant attacks from the Guelf peace party from 1376 onwards, they survived with popular support until the Ciompi revolt in 1378.

<sup>266</sup> Following A: *concorso* rather than B: *Compagnia*.

<sup>267</sup> A adds 'or administration'.

<sup>268</sup> A: 'having an equal companion'.

<sup>269</sup> 'To . . . life': add. Ed.



port than by the reality of the situation,<sup>273</sup> and that he would, in effect, live more ambitiously than befits someone in such an important position, who should be full of gravity and deprived of all passions and special concerns.

Nor am I moved by the danger Piero fears from a life office, since I set store by the effectiveness of the laws and the fact its authority is limited and always shared. Indeed, if this were something to be worried about, I would be more frightened of an annual or a three-year office, since the desire to keep oneself in power could encourage recourse to illegal measures, which a life Gonfalonier would not consider, unless he was very sick.<sup>274</sup> For in my opinion, there could be no finer, more secure and worthier position in one's native city than this, far preferable, I would think, to tyrannies and principates. I also hope that if we establish an effective method of electing this Gonfalonier, we shall ensure the election of, if not the most capable, at least one of two or three of the most capable men in the city. This will be quite enough, for he won't have to take decisions or rule by himself; the city will be ruled with the counsel of the wisest citizens, so his longevity will never be the cause of our ruin. And if by chance someone should be elected who isn't suitable, there will be ways of removing him – as we shall discuss later – which will be set up so they can be used without causing a scandal and without opening the door to uprisings and disorders.

Depriving the leading citizens<sup>275</sup> of their repast I don't think matters much, especially if the election not only of the Gonfalonier but of the rest of the government is established effectively. For once this two-monthly office is removed, there will no longer be any stigma or reduction in status attached to not holding it, and there will be other ways and other offices with which to bestow honour on men, who gain reputation, not so much from having the principal honours, as from exercising them with distinction, and behaving as good and worthy citizens. Anyone who comports himself well as an ambassador, a commissary, a member of the Ten of War and the other magistracies in charge of the most important affairs, as well as anyone who gives a good account of himself on the rostrum and in consultative meetings, will bring honour to himself and his family and will have

<sup>273</sup> *ragione delle cose.*

<sup>274</sup> *avrà lo stomaco bene guasto.*

<sup>275</sup> B adds 'and the principal families'.

far more credit and reputation than if he had been Gonfalonier. Look at the example of Venice, where the Doge is elected for life, yet the citizens there are honoured and esteemed. So in fact this wouldn't deter me from making the office for life; indeed I'm all the more convinced – although I would think the same anyway – by the value to the city of establishing a high rank that men have to struggle to reach through their ability and outstanding behaviour, through working hard and, when necessary, endangering themselves for their country. Apart from the fact that for such men there is no more fitting reward than this, it also bestows singular benefit on the city to fire and inflame generous and great-hearted men to win glory for themselves with rare and outstanding deeds. Although in upstanding citizens the bounty of nature and patriotism play a considerable part in this, yet the hope of attaining such an exalted rank makes them even keener.

Free cities mustn't object to their citizens' desire for honour and glory, since this appetite, or if you like ambition, is useful in making men think about and perform generous and exalted deeds. They shouldn't like them burning with a desire for greatness, or – to put it better – power, because anyone who makes it his idol wants to lay hold of it and keep it by whatever means. So we see that lords and others who have this as their objective lack any restraint and, urged on by this consideration, destroy lives and raze possessions of others to the ground.

Don't tell me that since the length of this office will prevent more than very few from enjoying it, few will be able to expect it and key themselves up with the hope of getting it; and that being restricted to so few, it will be less useful than it would be if the Gonfalonier was appointed for a long period – for then more people would enjoy it, yet not so many to prevent the worthiest citizens from hoping to get it. Because my reply to this is the same as Pagolantonio's. For it is true that although cities may be free, if they are set up well, they are sustained by the advice and talents of few people. If you take periods of ten or fifteen years at a time, you will find that in this time there are not more than three or four citizens on whom the success and the vitality<sup>276</sup> of the meetings and the most important actions depend. Nor will you find things were any different with the Greeks

<sup>276</sup> *la virtù e il nervo.*

and the Romans or any other nation, since precious stones are rare and extraordinary men are extremely rare; where they exist, it is inevitably they who normally provide the impetus. So I don't set as much store by gently warming up a lot of people as by enflaming as many as possible of these rarer spirits on whose shoulders the republic rests; the ordinary honours of the city are enough for the others. To the former should be held out the hope of an extraordinary position, which they may think of attaining not with factionalism, corruption or violence, but with outstanding deeds, with consuming all their abilities and life for the benefit of their native city; and since their city will receive more benefit from them than from the others, it should also entice them more than the others.

Having instituted the Gonfalonier for life, that is, the head of state, we must set up the other members of the government, taking particular care to arrange them so he cannot assume too much authority. If the material allowed us to impose the form we wanted on it, I would follow the example of the Venetians in preventing the Signoria from residing in the Palace.<sup>277</sup> Despite the fact that they wouldn't have the supreme authority that according to our statutes the 'six beans' have,<sup>278</sup> which in effect means they can do what they want, I would like the main weight of the government to rest mainly with them – as would be fitting, since they together with the Gonfalonier are the head of the city. The reason why I would prevent them residing in the Palace is that this office, being so exalted and accompanied with such pomp and splendour, is esteemed too much by everyone. Everyone sets his sights on it, so that our constitution has to ensure that it circulates among practically everyone, since in Florence anyone who hasn't been a member of the Signoria at least once is scarcely a man. This is why it was decreed that their term of office should last no longer than two months, shorter than any other office, and why it was surrounded by infinite prohibitions: three years' prohibition from holding it again for the person himself, one year for members of his family; six months' prohibition from membership of the Colleges; and a prohibition from holding practically any other

<sup>277</sup> Until the life Gonfalonier was created in 1502, the Signoria of eight Priors and the Gonfalonier of Justice lived in the Palazzo della Signoria for the two months of their office.

<sup>278</sup> Referring to the two-thirds majority vote of the Signoria, six out of eight beans cast in favour of a decree; see Glossary under 'Six beans'.

office at the same time: all invented to enable everyone to participate.<sup>279</sup> So it could happen that the power of the life Gonfalonier was considerably greater than is necessary. Being a man of intelligence with the reputation that his office gives him, and finding himself head of a magistracy that enjoyed sovereign, or at least considerable, authority, most of its members weak men of little worth, he will always get what he wants. If he does have difficulties with one Signoria, which will happen very rarely, it will be succeeded by another one, so he will almost always be able to manage things as he wants. This would not happen if in the Signoria he was always flanked by some of the leading and wisest men of the city, since to have men of brains and reputation deliberating affairs with him would be the greatest brake a life Gonfalonier could have. To do this, one would have to allow the Signoria to vote by an absolute majority and also get rid of so many prohibitions. This, I think, would be difficult to achieve as long as the Signoria stayed in the Palace with so many honours and such majesty, because enjoying the status it does, it will be very difficult to pass a law limiting this office to a few people. So to make it less resplendent and to remove it from the eyes of men, I would suggest removing the Signoria – if it could be persuaded to go – from the Palace and so much adornment.

But because the people are used to this custom,<sup>280</sup> I don't think you could persuade them to do it, and even if you managed it, given some favourable opportunity, I fear this memory would always remain in the minds of those unable to rise in status, encouraging them to be obstructive and to go back to the matter. So I would choose another solution, that is, I would allow the Signoria to reside in the Palace as now, with the trappings and pomp that it enjoys at present, nor would I deprive minor guildsmen<sup>281</sup> of this repast. Instead I would limit the sovereignty it now enjoys, reducing it so that neither it nor the Gonfalonier through it could frighten anyone, otherwise there would always be the danger that a Gonfalonier might overreach his

<sup>279</sup> The advisory Colleges of the Sixteen Gonfalonieri di Compagnia and the Twelve Good Men, who together with the Signoria constituted the Three Major Offices. On these prohibitions or *divieti*, which were 'of the greatest importance in the institutional history of Florence', see Guidi, *Il Governo*, vol. 1, pp. 130–3.

<sup>280</sup> A: 'abuse'.

<sup>281</sup> Members of the fourteen minor guilds, who enjoyed the statutory right to a quarter of the eight places in each Signoria, excluding the Gonfaloniership of Justice, for which they were ineligible.

powers. The authority and prerogatives I would like the Signoria to have would be as follows: to intervene as head of state in all the Councils – that is, the Great Council and the Councils in the middle, those that will enjoy the position held by the Seventy in the time of the Medici, and like the Eighty you have created now;<sup>282</sup> to have the position in making provisions and laws that will be described in the appropriate place; to act as head in all the affairs that will remain to the Colleges, as described below; to be the court of appeal for civil disputes – not with the unlimited powers they enjoy now, which can be the cause of a thousand injustices, but limited – and also for disputes of the communes and of the poor and impotent, and in cases where truth and equity may be acknowledged but through lack of proof or inflexibility cannot be obtained through the ordinary courts.

I wouldn't want it to have any authority in criminal matters, to issue any orders to magistrates either directly or indirectly unless related to the cases above, to issue safeconducts<sup>283</sup> of any sort, elect any officials, despatch ambassadors or commissaries, for however short a time, command soldiers or men-at-arms, intervene or get involved in affairs of state of any kind. I would pass a very clear and well-structured law about all these things that would cover and tie up all possible eventualities, placing checks and penalties in such a way that they would have to be observed. Having arranged all this, which would be extremely easy to do, you would have removed the basis of most of the dangers to be feared from the greatness of a life Gonfalonier. Once the authority of the Signoria had been reduced, the citizens would perhaps more readily agree to remove it from the Palace since they would not value it so highly. So you would achieve in two moves what would have been extremely difficult to obtain in one, which is the way wise rulers of republics often get things done – though it's not a matter of great importance, since these are differences in method rather than in results.

The authority of the government must rest on the shoulders of a Council the Romans called the senate and the Venetians the Pregadi, in place of which you have created the Eighty. So the first consideration

<sup>282</sup> On the Settanta, created in 1480, see Rubinstein, *Government of Florence*, pp. 199–201, and on the Ottanta, created in 1494, see below.

<sup>283</sup> *sicurtà*, probably referring to the 'salvconductus et seu securitates' issued by the Signoria and Colleges; cf. the 1473 law quoted by D. Marzi, *La Cancelleria della Repubblica fiorentina*, Rocca San Casciano, 1910, p. 396.

which arises is whether this council should be for life or for a limited period of time.<sup>284</sup> The Romans and the Carthaginians and many other republics made it for life; the Venetians make it annual, but the way their offices circulate means its members are almost always the same, and a well-qualified citizen is scarcely ever excluded unless some serious charge is made against him. If we could promise ourselves the same, there would be little to choose between making it for life or for a limited period of time; indeed, to make people have more respect for it and more stimulus to behave well, it might be better to make it annual. The Venetians are firm about never changing men without very good reason and voting as prescribed, not only in the Pregadi – which is large, with no salary or administration, and is in other words a Council, not a magistracy<sup>285</sup> – but evidently in all the other magistrates. The office of Savi Grandi<sup>286</sup> circulates among a small number who are almost always the same, and the elections of the principal external offices, that is the rectors of Padua, Verona and so on, proceed so methodically and with such order that usually men can guess where they are going to land up before they are elected.

But the measure and order that have created their long-lasting government, and perhaps their quieter attitude to things,<sup>287</sup> we could not hope to achieve for many years; and if we created this Council for six months or for a year, all those who should necessarily be included would frequently find themselves excluded. Therefore I would by all means make this a life Council, but much larger than you have planned it.<sup>288</sup> For in a large city like ours, eighty are few when they have to be for life. I would prefer it to consist of one hundred and fifty members, a number not so limited that all those in the city who were qualified

<sup>284</sup> Cf. Guicciardini's discourse, *Del modo di ordinare il governo popolare* (Logrogno, 27 August 1512), ed. R. Palmarocchi, *Dialogo del Reggimento*, Bari, 1932, p. 241, where he suggests a senate of c. 200, with the same reference to ancient senates and Venice. For discussions in Florence for a new specialised council in 1501–2 before the life Gonfalonier was elected, see note 258 above.

<sup>285</sup> On the Venetian Concilium Rogatorum or Consiglio dei Pregadi, see Lane, *Venice: A Maritime Republic*, Baltimore, 1973, pp. 96, 254.

<sup>286</sup> Six men, also called Savi del Consiglio, created by the Senate in 1400 to prepare its agenda, frame resolutions, etc. See Lane, *ibid.* p. 254.

<sup>287</sup> *la natura de' loro cervelli più quieta.*

<sup>288</sup> The Council of Eighty was established, like the Great Council, on 23 December 1498; it was elected for periods of six months by a procedure to ensure members, who had to be at least 40 years old, were carefully selected; it met once a week and had sole power to elect ambassadors. See Cadoni, *Storia e politica*, 20 (1981) ¶19, pp. 170–1; Pesman Cooper, 'The Florentine Ruling Group', pp. 91–3.

could not enter, nor so large that ignorant and bad types could enter, with vacancies frequent enough to give a lot of people hope of entering it. The Signoria must participate in it as head and it should enjoy the following powers: it should discuss all important affairs of state – that is, peace, leagues, alliances and wars – and make daily policy decisions; it should draw up soldiers' contracts and approve them if they have been made by other magistracies; approve new laws and provisions before they go to the Great Council; elect ambassadors and commissaries; and in effect deal with all the important decisions that have to be made in governing a state.

But since this council cannot meet the whole time and affairs require constant care and attention – many things needing to be discussed speedily and secretly before decisions are made – a more specialised magistracy is necessary. In time of war it should be in charge of military affairs, and in peacetime responsible for dealings with princes and ambassadors, and everything to do with the defence and expansion of the dominion. Sometimes it will discuss and manage things to be taken to the middle Council for conclusion; sometimes it will play its role after decisions have been made by the One Hundred and Fifty, by directing and bringing them to the agreed conclusion. So the office of the Ten should always be appointed, to be elected in the Council of One Hundred and Fifty, with the additional committee to be discussed below. Its members must always belong to this Council. They may not have special powers, or *balia*, nor authority to spend money without normal funding allocations and the commission of the One Hundred and Fifty. They may not make peace, leagues or war or take any such decision by themselves, nor draw up military contracts – or if they do, they must have the approval of the One Hundred and Fifty. Their office should last for six months and may not be renewed, but they shouldn't have more than a six-month prohibition from holding other offices. The Gonfalonier should attend their meetings when he thinks fit, since he is head of state and things of importance must not be discussed without his knowledge.

When this magistracy needs advice, this should happen either in the middle Council, or if it is thought the business is not such that it should be discussed there, a *pratica* will be called of ten or fifteen others,<sup>289</sup> chosen from the wisest and best qualified men in the city.

<sup>289</sup> B omits 'or fifteen'.

I wouldn't want these to be elected by the Ten themselves, to prevent them making a mistake by wanting to elect friends or relations or for other personal interests. But as soon as the Ten are elected, the advisory council should be elected by the outgoing and the new Ten, the Signoria and the Colleges, from members of the One Hundred and Fifty, to last for their period of office. If in the course of time there should be a vacancy in them or the Ten, through death or absence, a substitute should be elected in the same way. This *pratica* will be modelled upon what the Venetians call the council of 'the Ten with the addition' or *junta*,<sup>290</sup> which is the nerve of the government; because the twelve, fifteen or twenty wisest and most able citizens will always belong either to the Ten or to the *pratica*. Not only will they always participate in this restricted council, but due to their greater prudence and authority, they will be the ones in the middle council who will normally steer things in the right direction. And, in fact, once this council has been well chosen and set up, it will be impossible for the affairs of state not to go well. Nor will the Gonfalonier be able to usurp more authority than is fitting, for since he will have to deal with the important matters with the leading citizens, he won't be able to outwit them or behave in a secretive or frightening way except where reasonable to do so.

I am happy to expatiate on how to set up this Council successfully and on the fruits that can be expected of it, since it produces three good results in which the well-being of the city consists. The first, that important deliberations are in the hands of those who understand them and aren't decided by the arbitrary will of the populace, which is the first danger to be feared from popular government. The second, that – as I've said – it provides a brake on the excessive authority a life Gonfalonier might assume, so, as you can see, this middle Council, which I'd like to call the senate, acts as a moderating force between tyranny and popular licence. The third, that it provides a way of keeping the most able and best qualified citizens happy, because restricting government to such people not only ensures that things are governed by those capable of it but also satisfies citizens whom it would be bad to alienate.

<sup>290</sup> On the Ten, with its *zonta* of 15–20 senators for important decisions, see Lane, *Venice*, p. 256. Following Guicciardini, I translate this Florentine council as a *pratica* or additional advisory council, using *junta* as he does for the 100 electors discussed below.



The city is a body composed of many limbs, and although the basis of a free city is equality, nonetheless one can't prevent citizens enjoying different status according to their different levels of intelligence, virtue and merit. Otherwise if a spirited and deserving citizen failed to see himself somewhat raised up above those of little value who were undeserving, he would have reason to be unhappy with this form of government and desire change: from this, civil discord and revolution are born. And although I said yesterday that good citizens don't want to govern and that security is enough to ensure a city's prosperity, nevertheless it was easier for Plato to talk about this foundation<sup>291</sup> than for those in charge of republics to see it with their own eyes; and it is narrower than people have a taste for today, since they all naturally want to be esteemed and honoured. Rather, as I said a little time ago, it is perhaps more useful to cities that their citizens have some instinctive spark of ambition to arouse them to honourable thoughts and deeds than for their ambition to be totally dead.

We need not discuss this now. But since men clearly do have this desire, whether it should be praised or condemned, and since it has taken hold so firmly that we can't hope to put it out, in discussing how to form not a perfect but a possible government, we must try to see that all grades of citizens are satisfied, provided it can be done without damaging liberty. This rank<sup>292</sup> we have talked about certainly will not hurt it, for although they are life senators, there are a lot of them and their authority is limited to prevent them becoming lords, yet their status is such that it should suffice a citizen whose stomach is not corrupted by ambition. Because if he has moderate virtue, he should be pleased to be a senator; if he is outstanding, he will rise step by step to the highest honours: a member of the Ten, a member of the *pratica*, then one of those qualified for the Gonfaloniership when there is a vacancy. Such ranks are more attainable and more honourable in a free regime than under the Medici, because no one in Florence has a strong enough basis to hope to become head unless he belongs to Cosimo's lineage; and anyone who aspires to this must

<sup>291</sup> i.e. security from injustice; see p. 51. This is clarified by the marginal comment in A: 'that the security of the philosophers is not enough' (although the whole passage from 'And although' to 'for although' in the following paragraph is replaced in A by 'This is a way and a grade which is not harmful to liberty').

<sup>292</sup> *grado*: see Glossary.

love liberty and the popular regime, which provides his sole means of becoming head of state with public authority. How much better and more honourable the other honours are, since they are acquired by a reputation for virtue and not for favouritism, and since the men who acquire them follow their own judgement and not the signals of others! How satisfying it is to perform honourably on the public platform<sup>293</sup> and in consultative meetings, and to have the daily opportunity of demonstrating one's ability and intelligence! These ranks sufficed those ancient Romans and the citizens of other good republics; to them it seemed a worthy reward for their labours, after the consulates, after legations and the control of armies, to enter the senate and enjoy credit in consultative meetings and be revered by those who knew less than themselves. The attitude of a citizen who regards such ranks as unimportant is unhealthy and he should be isolated and driven out of his native city as a pernicious influence; whereas for a well-balanced person, the wiser he is, the more he recognises that they contain true honour and glory, since they seem to him far more honourable and satisfying than being either a tyrant or a prince.

I would prefer this Council of One Hundred and Fifty, the Ten and the *pratica* not to be appointed on the basis of the quarters but from the whole city, since in such matters distribution per quarter has no rationale: what matters is not whether the quarters are represented equally but that the most meritorious get elected.<sup>294</sup> For the same reason I wouldn't think it necessary to give the minor guildsmen their due proportion of places; on the contrary, I would want to appoint men from every guild according to their quality. And it would be much better to remove this distinction between guilds for all offices, or if not all, at least for those of critical importance.

So far, then, this senate has the following powers: to make decisions about matters of importance, to approve laws before they go to the Great Council, to elect ambassadors, commissaries and the Ten, as well as a few other elections to be mentioned below. As for

<sup>293</sup> i.e. as an orator in public assemblies.

<sup>294</sup> Hitherto the chief magistracies had always been elected on the basis of so many for each of the four districts into which Florence was divided: S. Spirito, S. Croce, S. Maria Novella and S. Giovanni, a quarter of the places in each being allotted to minor guildsmen; the election of the Seventeen Reformers in 1490 was one of the first magistracies to break with this tradition.

serious trouble.<sup>297</sup> This junta would provide an excellent remedy to both of these dangers, since it would break up factions, as more and changing groups of people would participate, and on the other hand, since the members of the junta could not themselves be elected to the Ten, they wouldn't be moved by ambition to expand the government but would cast their vote for the person they judged most deserving; and if part of the senate maligned this person, they would always tip the balance.<sup>298</sup>

It remains to discuss decision-making in the senate, since its value largely depends on this. We have taken it for granted that the senate will advise and deliberate on important matters, so things must be presented to it for approval, not predigested but in their raw state, so it can advise and discuss. For this reason the magistrate who summons a consultative meeting simply lays out the situation and asks for advice. Then, according to the old-established custom of this city, people are gathered together in their quarters, that is, each quarter separately, and they confer by themselves without hearing each other; then, before everyone, each quarter presents a report of the views expressed in its quarter. Sometimes the summoning magistrate is satisfied with this verbal report, sometimes he likes to put these opinions to the vote and accept the one with the most votes.<sup>299</sup> This method is very cut and dried and seems to have been invented either by people who think it takes for ever<sup>300</sup> to expedite the meeting and go home, or by someone who descends with the decision ready for approval instead of discussion.

The right way to do things, once the situation has been explained, is for the most authoritative men to state their opinion and to do so in the presence of everybody, because it will sometimes happen that in the whole meeting only one or two will have good ideas; in that case, it's good for them to be heard by everybody and not simply by

<sup>297</sup> As in fact happened in June 1499. See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, bk. 1, ch. 39, English translation and edition by L. J. Walker, London and Boston, 1975, vol. 1, p. 302.

<sup>298</sup> A adds a long passage describing the example of the Romans when electing the consuls and other principal officers 'that were elected by the people, where although sometimes disorders arose by mistake, yet because the plebs did not aspire to being elected themselves', generally the leading citizens were chosen.

<sup>299</sup> This procedure is illustrated by the series of *Consulte e Pratiche* volumes in the Florentine Archives, of which one has so far been edited: *Le 'Consulte' e 'Pratiche' della Repubblica Fiorentina nel Quattrocento*, 1 (1401), ed. E. Conti, Florence, 1981.

<sup>300</sup> lit. 'a thousand years'.

one quarter alone. If someone has one opinion and someone else the opposite, he can rise up and contradict it – and this can be done by one or more people. And if the same person wants to speak more than once, either to express it better, or to defend or change his opinion, he can do so. And because at the start men are unaccustomed to mounting the rostrum so freely and will go up circumspectly not to seem presumptuous, the Gonfalonier will have to urge this person and that person to go up and in general invite everyone to speak his opinion, using care to accustom them to this way of speaking and discussing things. Then when enough people have spoken and no one else wants to say anything, he should propose the opinions and accept the one approved by the majority; or if there's no clear decision and men are undecided, he should defer it to another day and not get worn out scrutinising and pondering things that need time to mature.

Opinions should be taken either viva-voce or by voting with beans. The ancients favoured taking the first way, modern republics have used beans or a secret ballot. Each of these methods has different arguments in its favour, but – to save discussing everything at great length – I prefer beans. But whichever you choose, be sure to stick to it and don't leave it to the Gonfalonier or the magistrate proposing the vote to use now the oral method and now beans. For there's often a considerable difference between them, and I don't want it to be in the Gonfalonier's power, or anyone else's, to dodge about trying indirectly to get the decision to go the way he wants. So whichever is decided on should be adhered to always and on every occasion. This method of consultation and decision-making will ensure that things are examined and understood better, with a better outcome. Men will be tested by more frequent comparison with others, and those with ability will have the means to make themselves known through debating and discussing affairs – which in a senate and in an adversarial court<sup>301</sup> only men of authority and the well-heeled will dare to do. This will be the right way to train men, and whether speaking or listening, they will learn more in one meeting than they do now in twenty. The men of worth will easily gain reputation

<sup>301</sup> *contraddittorio iudicio*. On Guicciardini's use of this forensic term, as well as *publicare* and *comparire*, drawn from his experience as a jurist, and their influence on his political ideas, see Cavallar, *Francesco Guicciardini Giurista. I Ricordi degli Onorari*, Milan, 1991 pp. 238–41, and Introduction, p. xx above.

citizens; on the contrary, it would provide a ladder to the top ranks. What it couldn't decide on its own would go to the senate; and where it needed advice, it would consult with the senate, or with the Ten and its *pratica*, as it thought best. In this way all the important decisions concerning the affairs of state and the dominion would be thoroughly dealt with.

It remains to discuss how to pass laws, or as we call them 'provisions', because the ancient system which we still use today couldn't be more pernicious and pestilential for a free state, having been invented, as it seems to me, by men who have been the leaders of narrow ones – who, fearing that one day they might be deprived of power by a law, decreed that the laws had to pass through many fine filters before reaching the open councils, to allow themselves time, through their cabals, always to prevent them passing. In this way they ensured that in Florence it was impossible to pass a new law against their wishes. The same would happen now, especially with a life Gonfalonier who was capable of impeding any law that limited his authority or did something else he did not like. This would be a great failing as far as freedom is concerned, since one or two people would have the power to obstruct a law that was useful or pleased the better part of the citizens.

So this is what I suggest. Having removed all the filters provided by the Signoria, the Colleges and the Conservators of the Laws, I would decree that a law should start off, initially, in the senate, where it could be proposed not only by the whole Signoria but also by any one of its members, as well as by members of the Colleges.<sup>309</sup> It should not come before the senate for approval but for basic discussion, to be debated and examined in the way I have suggested for other deliberations. To remove the chance of concealing the law, as we say, 'in a hood', I would be keen to have it published at least the previous day,<sup>310</sup> so that it will be known at least a day in advance to the Colleges, who I want to participate for various reasons – among them, to enable young men and people who are not well known to

<sup>309</sup> i.e., the Twelve Good Men and the Sixteen Gonfaloniers of the Companies

<sup>310</sup> As in fact was decreed on 19 November 1495, ed. Cadoni, *Storia e politica*, 21 (1982), p. 782, reflecting Savonarola's sermon on 28 July (*ibid.*, p. 779). Cavallar points out the importance of prior notification of arguments to be used in adversarial courts as a condition of the legal process (*Francesco Guicciardini Giurista*, pp. 238–40).

make themselves known, either by proposing a new law or by jumping up to rebut it or to discuss it. The way of life in this city up to now has made it difficult for anyone to become known unless he is born with the reputation enjoyed by his forefathers and his family. So sometimes his ability never comes to light and sometimes it is concealed for much longer than it should be – to the great detriment of the city, both because it loses the chance of profiting from tools it could put to good use, and also because, not knowing what men are like, it very often employs those who prove to be inept: all to the loss of the shop. But with these trials it will be easy for the right person to rise. Laws should receive final consent in the Great Council, in the same way as now, that is, they should be approved but not discussed.

GUICCIARDINI Do you want these senators to enjoy a salary?

BERNARDO No, on no account, because it would stimulate too much envy and everyone would be too keen to become one. The honour and reputation of being a senator for life is no mean reward, and apart from that it carries with it many advantages and will improve men's circumstances in many ways, so this should be sufficient.

Having set up the procedures for daily decision-making and for legislation, the next thing is the administration of justice, that is, criminal justice, since civil justice is well enough organised throughout the land. Therefore I would not change the office of the Eight of Ward with summary powers, or *balia*, for without this terror crimes would multiply too much.<sup>311</sup> I would like it to be elected in the Great Council, to prevent the senate enjoying too much authority; but it should be elected by majority vote so that its members are selected, as indeed the importance of this office demands. And I would add what I understand this friar is proposing now,<sup>312</sup> that is, that for all sentences against citizens concerning the state, not for anything else,

<sup>311</sup> On the Otto di Guardia, first appointed in 1378 and given full powers in the reform of 1478 to prosecute all crimes, see G. Antonelli, 'La magistratura degli Otto di Guardia a Firenze', *Archivio storico italiano*, 111 (1954), pp. 3–39; Guidi, *Il Governo*, vol. II, pp. 223–6; Zorzi, *L'amministrazione*, pp. 42–4, 50–3, 67–72, 83–9; see also Guicciardini's 1512 Logrogno discussion *Del modo di ordinare il governo popolare*, ed. Palmarocchi, pp. 251–2, Cavallar, *Francesco Guicciardini Giurista*, pp. 182–3.

<sup>312</sup> Savonarola was largely responsible for the law 'Pacis et Appellationis' of 19 March 1495, which allowed appeal from sentences by 'the six beans' of the Signoria or Eight of Ward (edited by Cadoni, *Storia e politica*, 20 (1981), ¶1, pp. 803–6); he was criticised by Machiavelli (*Discorsi*, bk. 1, ch. 45) for disallowing it in 1497, when Bernardo del Nero and other conspirators were sentenced to death.

there should be an appeal – not to the Great Council, as he suggests, but to the senate, where the convicting magistrate must be present to defend his sentence. When all the arguments have been heard and everyone has spoken who wants to, including the defendant, should he wish to appear personally, the vote must be taken. Nor should a two-thirds majority be necessary to acquit the defendant; a simple majority will be quite sufficient to pass sentence, whether to acquit him, condemn him anew, or confirm the sentence already given.<sup>313</sup> In fact I think that a sentence will very rarely be withdrawn, for by nature and because of mutual considerations, every magistrate will always be much readier to absolve than to condemn. However, it could be useful, because a popular rumour might for no reason get attached to someone, or some unfounded suspicion might arise which, since affairs of state are very sensitive, could lead to an impetuous conviction; for this, the right to appeal would provide quite effective medication.

What is more necessary and important is to do something about acquittals. For the reasons I've just given and spoke about more fully yesterday, they would be all too frequent: if there were only three people in each Eight of Ward who did not want to convict, the others would have to acquit or agree to too light a sentence. Crimes would thus multiply and people would become emboldened, with serious damage to the city. Nor could one hope that under the popular government in Florence an Eight of Ward or another like it would exercise the required severity against people held in regard, because it is very difficult to deal with those you love or of whom you wonder whether they won't one day give as good as they get, either to you or to your family. So in this situation we must use the life Gonfalonier, who won't need to be so circumspect since he is permanent, or else adopt another solution.

One could give the Gonfalonier powers to intervene and make proposals in every magistracy that has cognisance of criminal cases.<sup>314</sup> If he used them in those cases in which he thought the magistrates

<sup>313</sup> C: in the margin, Guicciardini comments: 'perhaps this appeal would be better made to the Forty'. See notes 315 and 316 below.

<sup>314</sup> In fact, in the law of 26 August 1502 the life Gonfalonier was, 'as head of justice', given powers to intervene and 'propose what seemed just and reasonable in every decision, judgement or criminal sentence' in Florence; see Zorzi, *L'amministrazione*, p. 103, Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft*, p. 142.

were proceeding sluggishly, he would certainly get them moving and spur them on to do proper justice. Nevertheless doing this alone doesn't satisfy me, since I think it's necessary for the Gonfalonier to rouse himself and assume a vigorous role as head of state, for he can do this better than anyone else when the state and freedom are threatened, also in all the cases in which impunity could bring in its wake general disorder. I wouldn't want him normally burdened with this responsibility, since it's so heavy that he would either become dragged down by it and incapable of doing the more important things; or if he was keen, he would make himself too odious and have too many enemies. It would be bad for the city to have a head who was widely disliked, when one has to have daily dealings with him and a great many benefits depend on him – and if he was too enthusiastic, he would also become too frightening.

Since a magistracy of a few people cannot be expected to be severe enough and the Gonfalonier should not assume so heavy a burden, we must think in terms of a greater number and a Council of many people to succeed where a few have failed. It occurred to me that whenever a magistracy has a criminal case that produces an acquittal, if there was a definite prosecutor and plaintiff, or accuser, he could appeal against it to the senate in the same way I have described for an appeal against a conviction;<sup>315</sup> but if he did not expedite it within a certain time, that the case should devolve automatically without any other request or vote to a body of forty people to be drawn by lot, so many from the Signoria, so many from the Colleges, so many from the senate and so many from its second council for elections. These forty people should have powers to examine, investigate and proceed as they think fit – the same authority, in effect, that the magistracy had, and they should be obliged to expedite it within a given time, acting by an absolute majority.<sup>316</sup> And because no one wants to take responsibility for proposing unpopular things, I would like everyone

<sup>315</sup> Here A refers to the Venetian Quarantia with cognisance 'over many criminal cases ... I would like something similar, but not totally imitating theirs'; see note 316 below.

<sup>316</sup> The Quarantia was in fact established as part of a more general reform of law in December 1502 (anticipated by a reform bill passed in August 1494, but not implemented before the fall of the Medici); influenced by Venice's Quarantia Criminale, it was given fifteen days to expedite cases after the Eight had failed to do so in a month; see Martines, *Lawyers and Statecraft*, p. 142, Zorzi, *L'amministrazione*, pp. 104, 106–7.



to write down his opinion without revealing his name; all the slips should be counted, and the sentence is the verdict that receives more than half the votes, and more votes than any other. This law should specify with special care the method of bringing a charge, examining, defending, proposing, acquitting, convicting and the numbers who have to participate, that is, how many from the major and how many from the minor guilds; also if people wanted all criminal cases to be able to come to this court or only certain important crimes. But that's enough in general terms about this method of judgement, which would undoubtedly terrorise and be a great restraint on criminals, as well as providing great protection, especially for the popular government and the freedom of the city.

We must now talk about taxes and other matters to do with money. This is a very important topic, since on one hand it involves everyone, and on the other if money is not provided in time, it is thrown away, and what could initially have been achieved with a groat cannot later be done with a ducat.<sup>317</sup> However, taking everything into account<sup>318</sup> – that is, the people's failure to recognise what needs to be done and the fact that the senate does know what needs to be done and includes citizens of every kind, that is those who live off their landed wealth, merchants, rich, poor, and every kind of person, so there would be no fear of them adopting unfair measures, or acting without due consideration – I would make the senate principally responsible for tax legislation. Not that I wouldn't want the bill also to go to the Council once it had been passed by the senate, but I would want a simple majority vote to suffice in the Council.

Expenses should be included in the funds assigned to the Signoria and the Colleges, and the Gonfalonier should also have some special responsibility for them – not such as to prevent the relevant officials being able to spend without his approval, but sufficient to act as a brake on big spenders.<sup>319</sup> It is true that states cannot be governed without money and that it is often harmful to make savings. Nevertheless, because the ordinary income is insufficient and citizens have to contrib-

<sup>317</sup> A groat or *grosso* was worth 6s 8d, or a third of a pound in silver coinage, a golden ducat, like a florin, was worth approximately seven pounds, see P. Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange*, London, 1986, pp. 32–33. C. M. Cipolla, *Il Governo della Moneta a Firenze e a Milano nei secoli XIV–XVI*, Milan, 1990, p. 162.

<sup>318</sup> A: 'it would displease me for the imposition of taxes to have to go to the Great Council . . .'

<sup>319</sup> *chi andassi con la mano troppo larga.*

ute from their own pockets, Florence's excessive expenditure does untold damage and causes great discontent and disunity, so it's good to be careful to moderate expenditure as much as possible. It is not necessary to go into great detail and it would prolong our discussion indefinitely: it's enough to give a general outline, for things will be examined and analysed better by the man on the job. But I'd like you to say what you think, and if there is anything to add or remove.

**CAPPONI** Actually, I have been listening in silence and with the greatest attention, since it seems to me you've considered everything extremely well. I've always known how wise you were, but in view of the fact that you have never seen this city free in your lifetime, on the contrary, you grew up and lived under a tyrannical regime, I think it's a miracle how well you have thought about and planned a free government.

**SODERINI** I agree. What you said at the beginning seems to me even truer now, that if Florence and Venice didn't have different names, a government like yours would seem identical to Venice's, since there are no substantial differences between them. So if theirs is excellent, as everyone admits, and as is proved by reason and shown by experience, this one of ours should be just as good. So may God give us grace to see it in existence and bequeath it to our children, since it would be the greatest – the most beautiful, secure and honourable – treasure we could possibly leave them.

**GUICCIARDINI** What among other things has amazed me in your discussion today is the knowledge you have shown of Greek and Roman history, which I previously thought you lacked – and as indeed seemed confirmed by the fact that yesterday you made little mention of it.

**BERNARDO** I have no learning, and you all know it. But I enjoy reading all the translations I have been able to get hold of, which have taught me some of the things I have referred to today. But there aren't many of them, and because I have neither mastered them to my satisfaction, nor do I think these translations capture the flavour of the Latin originals, I have always avoided showing I have even the slightest knowledge of them. I judged that I would gain more reputation by being considered totally ignorant of these matters and speaking without the help of books than I would if, through wanting to profit from what little I have read, I was thought a show-off, or better informed about these things than in fact I am.

But let's get back to the subject. I haven't yet talked about how the Gonfalonier is to be elected. Here, I wouldn't follow the example of the Venetians, who – as Pagolantonio, and doubtless the rest of you, know – have had little confidence in the judgement of the people (I call the people its Great Council) and who at the same time are afraid of the excitability of the few. This is the reason, as I see it, why they have restricted the election of the Doge to a small number of electors, who are chosen partly by lot, partly through a series of filters,<sup>120</sup> in order to make it unclear who the ultimate electors will be and so avoid corruption and ambition. On the other hand, since these electors, forty-one in number, must for good reason be well qualified, they have relied on them knowing how to elect and, in the absence of corruption, making a good election.

Their reasons for doing things this way I think are good, but it doesn't seem to me they have found the right solution. For presupposing that election to these Forty-One falls to men by chance, it will in this way be given to the ignorant whom they wanted to avoid – since this was the only reason why it was taken away from the Great Council. However, if it goes to the leading men in the Senate, as I imagine normally happens, it will then be possible to guess who the electors are going to be, and this will result in the corruption and ambition they are frightened about. Even supposing it doesn't result in this, what is to stop them negotiating and doing deals with each other, for themselves or their friends, when it comes to it and they are locked up, as they put it, in conclave, where they sometimes have to spend several days before they reach a conclusion? Being few in number will mean they have considerable power; indeed, if you talk to Venetians who are willing to tell you the truth, they evidently conduct endless negotiations with each other once the electors are in conclave.<sup>121</sup> Would you like to have first-hand evidence of this? Giovanni Lanfredini, whom you were all acquainted with, enjoyed – as you know – many close friendships and influence in Venice;<sup>122</sup> as soon as the Forty-One were chosen, he informed Lorenzo that 'such,

<sup>120</sup> i.e. selection procedures. Lane graphically lists 10 preliminary procedures before the Doge was elected by the Great Council (*Venice*, p. 111).

<sup>121</sup> A: 'they will confess that when they are in conclave, they have no fewer negotiations and arrangements among the Forty-One than the cardinals have in conclave to elect the pope.'

<sup>122</sup> As director of the Medici bank in Venice and Florentine ambassador there in 1478, see Biographical notes.

Nor has anyone who has attempted to acquire reputation through this means, once he has acquired it and gained power over the minds of the people, directed it to a good end – as Pericles is said to have done, who was initially moved by ambition but, once he had established himself, used his authority for the benefit and greatness of his country. Indeed, such men have almost always had bad effects, which I need not dwell on now: enough to say that, for those who want to rise by indirect means, it offers a way of improperly insinuating oneself with the people, whence many are often raised up higher than they deserve.

The other way, which is the opposite of this, is to rise via the senate, by gaining a reputation for being a supporter of its dignity and advantages. For although the senate and the populace are members of the same republic and should all strive towards the same goal, yet it often happens that there are rivalries and differences of opinion between them. Usually this provides the basis for the senate thinking it better to deal with things according to its own arbitrary decision, while to the populace it doesn't seem right to be ruled by the senate. Although this strife sometimes has honourable beginnings, it later departs from them as it develops. For man's nature is insatiable: anyone who embarks on a course of action to maintain his rank and avoid oppression, once he has achieved this objective, doesn't stop there but tries to increase it more than is right, and as a result he oppresses others and usurps their position in society.

When the republic is so constituted that the people are more powerful than the senate, those who chose to rise via the people are more numerous and the means they use are more unjust. This is because normally abuses arise from those with most power, and when these are the people, then any one who defends the senate does so less to acquire greatness than to defend his position and the side he favours most. When, on the contrary, the senate is more powerful, it becomes the source of abuses and dangerous thoughts, and there are more people who try to curry favour with it. But whichever way round it is, anyone making these assumptions thinks less about what is right and beneficial to the city than about satisfying those he adheres to or whomever it is he wants to please. Indeed, when there is no discord at all, these instruments,<sup>326</sup> in order to afford access to his ambition,

<sup>326</sup> i.e. either the people or the senate.

often try to create discord through proposing new laws and new projects. Everything should therefore be done to temper republics so that this route to power via ambition will be barred, or at least closed as far as possible. This could be of such importance that no trouble spent on it can ever be excessive.

So if the life Gonfalonier were to be elected in the Great Council, where the senate is in a minority, it would be easy for a citizen, whether he is a senator or not, to think of attaining this rank of Gonfalonier with the popular techniques described above, and by initiating things that are pleasing to the populace. If, on the contrary, he were to be elected in the senate, anyone aspiring to this rank would devote himself entirely to the senate, putting its wishes before the advantage of the city and taking little account of the people's needs, something which is not in the interests of the city. For anyone who finds himself in the government should hold equally dear all the members of the republic, according to their rank, and think about the needs of everyone according to what is fitting. So to appoint the Gonfalonier, I think one should assemble the senate and all those who can participate with it in the election. Having voted on forty or fifty people, to be nominated by people drawn by lot, one should take the three with the most votes, whether they had won the required majority or not, and vote on them another day in the Great Council, and the one with more votes than the others and who had more than half the votes cast should be Gonfalonier. And in case no one won a majority, another three should be elected in the senate, to be sent back to the Great Council and voted on in the same way, and the one who won a majority and had most votes should remain elected. And if no one won, all six should be sent back and voted on in the Great Council, the same day or another day, and the one with the most votes, even if he failed to win a majority, should be Gonfalonier.<sup>327</sup>

This method should, I think, avoid all the disorders in the Venetian system. Since so many participate in the election, there is no danger of partiality or corruption; and since they are the best qualified men in the city and more discerning than the Great Council, the Great

<sup>327</sup> In 1502, the life Gonfalonier was elected entirely in the Great Council, nominations by any of its members being voted on by a quorum of 1500, those receiving a simple majority being voted on a second time, or more, until one nominee received a simple majority with more votes than any of the others.

Council will have little chance of making a mistake when it has to vote on candidates who have already been sifted and reduced to three. For although it may not always choose the best of the three, as I think it always will, it's equally possible that one of the three most able men in the city will be elected; and I think it will practically never happen that one of the first three is not elected in the Great Council. This method has a certain conformity with the way the Romans elected their kings, who were first elected in the senate and then had to be elected by the people. And it will avoid the disadvantages I feared; for as no Gonfalonier can be elected unless he meets with the approval of the people and the senate, ambition will drive no one to employ seditious and unreasonable techniques to throw himself at one rather than the other – on the contrary, it will stimulate every leading citizen to live well and behave in such a way that he can enjoy reputation and benevolence throughout the city and be held a man of worth and lover of his country.

And if such care might seem unnecessary – since those routes for the ambitious to achieve power that I fear are sufficiently blocked, thanks to the way the government has been set up – I say one can't be too careful; and because the populace sometimes gets a wrong idea, due to certain situations and false rumours, and quite wrongly esteems someone who does not deserve it (which, if it chanced to happen at a time when one had to elect the Gonfalonier, could move the people to some excess), this method would, I think, give us greater protection from all possible mistakes. The situation could be so serious that, even if such care was only necessary once in a hundred years, this arrangement couldn't fail to be extremely useful.

I would follow the same procedure for electing senators when there was a vacancy – and for the same reason, that is, to deprive anyone of the hope of acquiring power except by the straight and narrow path. For, unless I am mistaken, such laws would certainly be a great incentive to good behaviour, in the private sphere as well as in public offices and the senate. With the Gonfalonier and subsequently the Ten and its *pratica* added to them, I am hopeful that most of these men would compete with each other to do good and help their country, from which excellent results would follow.

These and other such incentives are necessary in a republic if you want to encourage men to behave well. It is true, as I said yesterday, that provided men have no more to gain from bad behaviour than

from good, they are naturally more inclined to behave well – to the extent that anyone who lacks this inclination and prefers to fulfil himself by behaving badly can be called a beast rather than a man. Nevertheless, because we are so frail and have so many opportunities for corrupting or perverting this instinct, the ignorant, for various reasons, easily decline from the path of virtue. Therefore the wise men who founded republics in antiquity, thinking it necessary to help to buttress this natural inclination, established rewards and punishments, saying wisely that they were the foundation of cities.<sup>328</sup> By rewards, you shouldn't think they meant that every time a citizen performed some good deed he had to be paid; apart from such a mercenary relationship between a country and its citizens being unfitting, no republic would have enough revenue to pay for it. No, the rewards lie in having set up the system of honours and offices in such a way that citizens who behave well are distinguished and acknowledged by the others: this is something that inflames noble<sup>329</sup> minds more than money or any other kind of remuneration. This system of rewards carries penalties with it, too; since by giving offices to the deserving members of the republic, the others are excluded and kept down. Any man worth his name fears such abasement and to escape it adopts the opposite way of life. I don't say that this punishment works as effectively for the wicked as rewards do for the good, because there are certain types so badly disposed that they don't know the meaning of honour and shame. For them criminal penalties are necessary – here, at least for the most serious crimes, it seems to me there is adequate provision, and it will daily get better. Since a government like the one you have initiated would in fact have the best<sup>330</sup> and the wisest administrators, they would make constant adjustments, with men competing to devise good laws that would cope with the problem of these wretches better every day.

Since, as Piero Guicciardini said, it could happen that a Gonfalonier was so incompetent that the city would suffer too much waiting for him to die, we must devise a solution to the problem within the law, to avoid opening the way to uprisings and scandals. I think this is unlikely to happen, for if we elect the Gonfalonier in the way suggested above, it will be almost impossible for the election not to

<sup>328</sup> Cf. *Ricordo C* 134, ed. Spongano, pp. 145–6, tr. Domandi, p. 75.

<sup>329</sup> A: 'generous'.

<sup>330</sup> A: 'the men of most worth'.

able way. It seems to me that the government is good in general and has the main features one requires in a free republic. It bears a very close resemblance to the Venetian government, which, if I'm not mistaken, is the finest and best government ever enjoyed by a city, not only in our times, but also perhaps in ancient times. This is because it borrows from all the different types of government, of the one, the few and the many, and is moderated by all of them, so that it has gathered most of the good features of each and escaped most of their worst ones.

The Doge, the Pregadi, and their select principal magistracies exercise the care and vigilance that a prince or an optimate regime enjoys, by the concentration of activities in the hands of experts; on the other hand, they are constrained in such a way that they cannot become tyrants. The Great Council enjoys the good features that are fundamental to popular government, that is, protection of liberty, the rule of law and individual security; but it is counterbalanced by the Doge, the Pregadi and the magistracies that descend from them, so that important decisions are not subject to the arbitrary will of the populace and there is no danger that things dissolve into that pernicious popular licence. So you see that since that government was established, it has lasted hundreds of years in the same form, without ever experiencing sedition and civil unrest. This is not because there are no enmities and feuds as in other cities, since they are visible when they have a legitimate reason to surface; or because there are no ambitious and uncontrolled characters who would cause trouble if they could. It is because the institutions of the government hold them in check, despite these characters. Look at the way the Greek republics were governed, and especially the Roman republic that was so successful. You will find it was seething with sedition, full of tumults and a thousand troubles. If it had not been for the Romans' energetic use of the arms they possessed, with which they withstood every mistake they made, by living like that they would have brought the Roman republic crashing down a thousand times.

Your republic would be like theirs. Since theirs was excellent, yours would at least be good, and without doubt such as our city has never seen before. For either we have been subject to one person, as in the time of the Medici, which was a tyrannical government; or a few people have held power in the city, as happened from the fall



of Messer Giorgio Scali until 1434,<sup>331</sup> and before that on many other occasions. Then the few oppressed the other citizens and held them in servitude with a thousand insults and rudenesses; and they were so factious among themselves that they exiled, decapitated and destroyed each other, and did far more damage to this poor city of ours than our enemies ever did. Or our city has been in the arbitrary and licentious power of the populace, as at the time of the Ciompi and when Messer Giorgio Scali enjoyed power under the arm of the plebs, and in earlier times.<sup>332</sup> Then it suffered so much, with such damage and destruction, that it is a miracle it didn't become enslaved to foreigners a hundred thousand times. Or else it has enjoyed a mad existence when the plebeians were free to do what they liked while power was held by the few, as at the time of the *ammoniti* or proscriptions,<sup>333</sup> when things became so tangled and confused that I don't think even in the time of Chaos they were worse.<sup>334</sup> So you see how much factionalism we have suffered and what misery has resulted from it: so many citizens sent into exile, so much noble stock<sup>335</sup> destroyed, so many houses burnt, so many riches plundered or otherwise rooted out, so many outstanding citizens decapitated and killed, so many frequent and memorable revolutions that I don't know why it hasn't a thousand times plunged over the edge into ruin.<sup>336</sup> So unless fortune or God's goodness grant us grace to discover a form of government like this one, or similar to it, we must fear the same ills as in the past. But if we do manage to make our way towards such a government, we can hope for every blessing and enjoy true liberty, which – if we don't deceive ourselves – our city hasn't seen or experienced up to the present day.

<sup>331</sup> That is, from January 1382 to the return of Cosimo de' Medici from exile in October 1434.

<sup>332</sup> Scali was a popular leader during the 1378 Ciompi revolt and especially in the three subsequent years of popular government: see *History of Florence*, pp. 1–2; on this period and two earlier popular movements in the 1290s and the 1340s, see J. M. Najemy, 'Guild Republicanism in Trecento Florence: The Successes and Ultimate Failure of Corporate Politics', *American Historical Review*, 84 (1979), pp. 53–71.

<sup>333</sup> In the 1350s, when the Guelf leaders conducted a witch-hunt against their enemies by proscribing them as Ghibellines; see G. A. Brucker, *Florentine Politics and Society: 1343–1378*, Princeton, 1962, pp. 170–1.

<sup>334</sup> At the beginning of creation; see Hesiod, *Theogony* 116: 'very first of all Chaos came into being'.

<sup>335</sup> A: 'progeny'.

<sup>336</sup> *andata in ultimo precipizio*.

**SODERINI** You're quite right, so may God grant us this favour! But what do you actually think yourself – are you optimistic that we can achieve such a blessing? You talked about it yesterday, but critically rather than constructively, so I would like you to talk about it again.

**BERNARDO** Pagolantonio, I'm no soothsayer, and you're far better judges of the situation than I can be. But I know very well that if in these early days the idea of creating a life Gonfalonier and a permanent senate had been mooted, it would have been derided by practically everybody. For everyone has at the moment proposed either a more equal or a more broadly-based government, so they would be totally opposed to anyone who talked of limiting it; and they would become suspicious that these laws – all of which aim at stabilising the popular government and making it more long-lasting, and at preserving liberty – would be proposed in order to introduce a narrow government or a tyranny. The city is not used to a popular way of life and has never seen liberty, so the confused situation<sup>337</sup> of these initial stages is something that no one understands; having emerged so recently from the Medici regime, the people are extremely suspicious and take offence over everything.

Good governments are introduced either by force or by persuasion. Force would be when someone who happens to be prince wants to renounce the principate and institute a republic, since he would be the one to issue the commands and orders. This would be an extremely easy way of doing it, partly because – as I've said – everything would depend on him; partly because when the people, who had lived under the tyranny without thinking about liberty, saw themselves suddenly conducted to a free republican way of life,<sup>338</sup> lovingly and without the use of arms, they would think, despite the fact it was introduced already ordered and limited in size, that they had entered paradise and accept everything as a gain. This couldn't happen to us today, because the people are resolved on having unlimited participation, and they believe that the regime is already theirs and that they have earned it by rising up and expelling the Medici. In addition, when someone was seen voluntarily relinquishing his principate, he would be trusted quite excessively, for he would be seen to have been moved only by love of his country, therefore his orders would be

<sup>337</sup> A and B: 'intrigue and chaos'.

<sup>338</sup> *al vivere libero*.

accepted because of his former power to command, and obeyed willingly because of the authority and trust he would have acquired.

Certainly, if men realised that true honour and glory consist in this, they would find princes enough to do it. For I don't know how a man could leave a more honourable memorial of himself than by performing so outstanding a deed, which would reveal his goodness and his immense love towards his country in clearly putting its good before his own greatness and that of his family and his progeny. None of this work could be attributed to fortune; it would all depend on his own merit. Nor would its fruits benefit only a few people for a short period, but as far as he was concerned, infinite numbers of people and for many ages.

But men's taste has been corrupted: they don't believe true honour consists in anything but power, so men like this are not to be found. If such men made the excuse – as Sulla did, after relinquishing his dictatorship<sup>339</sup> – that they daren't relinquish power because of the ingratitude and bad behaviour of republics on occasion towards someone who has given up his principate, they know this is an inadequate excuse. For anyone who considers man's duty to love his country, and the glorious and everlasting memorial he would acquire from such a deed – which neither ingratitude nor anything else could ever deprive him of – he would value them so much in themselves that he wouldn't care about whether his country was grateful to him or not. Such ingratitude could damage him little if he wanted to live privately, away from affairs – if, indeed, it existed at all, since it's not very likely it would, towards someone who had voluntarily behaved so well, especially if he had not shed blood during his principate or made particular enemies through his cruelty, as did Augustus<sup>340</sup> and many others who often talked about restoring the republic but never had the slightest intention of doing so.

But to get back to the subject. A government would also be introduced by force when a patriotic citizen, seeing things in disorder and lacking sufficient courage to be able to reform them by consent and common agreement, tried to seize enough power by force to set up a good government, even in defiance of the others, as Lycurgus did

<sup>339</sup> Lucius Cornelius Sulla's dictatorship lasted from 81 to 79 BC.

<sup>340</sup> A: 'Sulla and like Augustus'. C. Octavius Augustus ruled as virtual head of the state after defeating Antony in 31 BC until his death in 14 AD, receiving the title of Augustus in 27 BC.

when he instituted those sacred laws at Sparta. When such men are found, they should be lauded and honoured and shown the gratitude that this kindness merits, since their deed is the greatest that can be done for a city. Even so, one shouldn't want to have to use this method, since it's too dangerous and it would give the ambitious an opportunity to establish a tyranny under the guise of performing this good deed. It could also happen that someone initially embarked on this venture with good intentions, only to change his mind after tasting power and become converted to tyranny. This last danger is all the greater, in so far as a government set up by this method of force cannot abandon it the same day it's established, for until it is consolidated or experienced to be good by the people who initially didn't like it, they would attempt to ruin it. So force must continue to be used until the government has taken root; and the longer it is used, the greater danger there is of wanting to continue to keep it. You know what the proverb says: delay breeds vice.

So we must rely on persuasion, which would not at the moment be listened to. I don't doubt, however, that as things are going, it won't be long before most of the disorders are acknowledged to exist by a lot of people, who will be torn by the desire to do something about it on one hand, and the fear of power becoming too restricted on the other. Here, as I see it, fortune will inevitably play a role, for the disorders that will open people's eyes could be so disastrous that no measures will be in time – especially since the turmoil in Italy, as I said earlier, will be more violent and dangerous for the rulers of states than usual. It could also happen that these disorders, though considerable, did great damage to the city without totally destroying it; then the crux will be whether whoever is responsible for introducing the necessary reform does his job well, since fear that the leading citizens will want to resort to a narrow government will always present great difficulties. So it could be that a life or long-term Gonfalonier seems a better solution than any other, since he would cast less of a shadow over them than a permanent senate, and also because this is the sole reason why the city remains badly instituted.

What happens after a Gonfalonier is created – in the event of his being created<sup>341</sup> will depend on the quality of man he is. If he is ambitious or too suspicious, he won't try to restrict power any further,

<sup>341</sup> This is omitted in A, since of course Guicciardini was writing after the event.

in time to enjoy the right company and occasion to be able to achieve their effect. So I remain doubtful. At any rate, it's unfortunate that there is no hope of reforming the city, unless it is first endangered by some event arising from the mistakes that will be made – since it's a bad state of affairs to be incapable of enjoying good before suffering harm. As I said yesterday, I would be much more confident if the city were young. A young city adopts new laws more easily than one which has grown old under bad governments. In addition, although things still go easily and happily as long as fortune is fresh and hasn't yet run her course, when she has begun to turn her back, it seems on the contrary impossible to rise again and recover – due either due to the bad customs and the corruption that stem from a city's great size, or perhaps to the natural life-cycle of things in this world,<sup>345</sup> which brings to an end the lives of cities and empires, as well as human bodies, depriving them in their old age of the strength and vitality<sup>346</sup> they enjoyed in their youth.<sup>347</sup>

Be sure of this, if this government fails to reform itself after its disorderly start, it will inevitably end up either destroying the city, which will lose its dominion and become a subject territory, or it will become a tyranny, which is the normal fate of all licentious popular governments. If it is like the Medici's, it will have the same bad features described above; if different, however it is, it cannot fail to be much more strange than those in the past. The reason is obvious, for since the Medici regime did not succeed an open government<sup>348</sup> but one where power was in the hands of the few, the people at large, who had not controlled it, had no perception of losing anything and easily accepted the transference of power from one to the other. On the contrary, the conditions of those times were such that the minor guildsmen<sup>349</sup> always did well out of these troubles and changes, for the leaders<sup>350</sup> were destroyed and those at the bottom were pulled

<sup>345</sup> 'from the order of the things of this world'; A: '... of human affairs'. Cf. Machiavelli, *Florentine Histories*, bk. v, ch. 1, translated by L. F. Banfield and H. C. Mansfield, Princeton, 1988, p. 146.

<sup>346</sup> *virtù vitale*.

<sup>347</sup> Cf. *Ricordo C* 139, ed. Spongano, p. 151, tr. Domandi, p. 76 (comparing the life of cities and men, but whereas men die because their bodies wear out, cities die through either 'bad fortune or bad government').

<sup>348</sup> *una libertà*.

<sup>349</sup> *e' minori*.

<sup>350</sup> *principali*, see the Glossary under *padrone*.

up and continually improved and ennobled their status; nor did the heads of the government have any reason not to cherish them since they regarded them as their friends. This was true of every change, especially that of 1434, because the Medici family, among their other growing assets, enjoyed the favour of the low-born.<sup>351</sup> But now that the people have tasted the sweetness of liberty and a regime in which everyone thinks he participates, it will be impossible to revert to a regime where power was restricted to a few without it being detested by the mass of the people; its boss,<sup>352</sup> whoever he is, will have to live full of distrust and base his power on force; what states are like that are ruled by violence and suspicion you know without my having to tell you.

There is another inference to be drawn from this. It won't affect me since I won't live so long, but it will affect you, who are still young and, unless things end up in total disorder, cannot fail to enjoy great reputation in Florence. What you have to do, as I told you yesterday, is to forget all other objectives: accept that this is the government you have to live under, and behave in such a way that it appears you are willing to accept it, being ready with the means at your disposal to seize every possible opportunity to reform it – but without letting yourselves be so carried away by this desire that you try to attempt it before the right time. For the same enterprises which are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to achieve when conducted at the wrong time, become extremely easy when the time and occasion are right. Anyone who attempts them at the wrong time not only will not succeed, but there is a danger that by attempting them, he wrecks them for the time when they would easily have succeeded – this being one of the reasons why the patient are considered wise. If the right occasion for reform arises, remember that if you can't completely achieve the target you aimed at,<sup>353</sup> be satisfied that things are in a tolerable condition and that the city remains alive. For the rest, it's better to accept things and temporise as best you can than to seek change, so that nothing worse can happen to you. But now it's time I gave way to you, since I've nothing else to say and I've spoken at much greater length than I initially thought I would.

<sup>351</sup> *uomini bassi*.

<sup>352</sup> *padrone*.

<sup>353</sup> A: 'the perfection man desires'.

GUICCIARDINI But please tell us two more things: how old do you think the life Gonfalonier should be, and do you want all the offices to be appointed in the Great Council to be chosen by a majority vote?

BERNARDO I don't think the Venetians impose an age restriction on the Doge – there was one called Messer Andrea Dandolo, whom our Petrarch was very friendly with, who was elected when he was about thirty or a little more. The Pope can also be elected very young, the last Boniface being elected when he was twenty-eight.<sup>354</sup> For a long time the Romans did the same for the consulate; then they decreed that no one could be consul unless he was forty-two years old. There were many excellent young men in Rome, like the Scipios<sup>355</sup> and others: if they had been excluded from office on account of their age, the republic, for whose benefit the young men performed such outstanding deeds, would have suffered greatly from it – and the same is true of every city and all periods. Nevertheless, for a supreme office that has to be held for life like this one, I would like someone of mature age. For apart from being normally more moderate and less dangerous, as well as enjoying more majesty, a young man who held office for a long time might upset the others too much. In Venice, there is the recent example of Francesco Foscari, who was perhaps as excellent and wise a Doge as any the city has ever had, and under whom many acquisitions were made. Nevertheless, because he survived for more than thirty years, he irritated the nobles so much that they deposed him, alleging that he had returned to his second childhood because there was nothing else they could say.

Apart from what I have said about the Gonfalonier and the senators, I would like the principal offices – such as the Otto di Balìa, the advisory council to the senate, the Captaincies of Pisa, Arezzo, Pistoia, Volterra and Cortona – to be elected by majority vote at all costs.<sup>356</sup> This is both because of their importance and because I would like them to serve as rungs in the scale of honour. For in a free regime which has the task of trying to accustom men to set store by honours and regaling a lot of worthy people, it is very useful to have as many esteemed ranks as possible to act as steps, one leading to the next. For this reason the Venetians were wise not to send

<sup>354</sup> Pietro Tomacelli, elected Boniface IX, 1389–1404.

<sup>355</sup> A: *Scipii Africani*.

<sup>356</sup> A includes in this list the Conservators of the Laws.

someone out to a minor office who had already enjoyed a major one. I would also make the fortresses more important;<sup>357</sup> and if the people didn't like this ordinance, I would at least ensure that the candidates won a certain majority of the votes before being drawn by lot. In short, my objective would be to have the most important offices elected by majority vote; and for the others that mattered less, to have the name of everyone who won an absolute majority put into a bag to be drawn by lot.<sup>358</sup> I would, however, have more or fewer offices chosen in this way depending on how confident I felt. And for those that continued to be chosen by majority vote, or by a restricted number of votes, I would at all costs add that, since a certain number had been voted on, those who received the most votes should be elected, even if they hadn't won an absolute majority.<sup>359</sup> This is to prevent the Council refusing to grant a majority, in order to force a law through that would make the electoral system much more open than it was initially.<sup>360</sup> GUICCIARDINI I, too, will say another word. You have praised Roman arms, as they are deservedly praised by everyone, and you have heavily criticised their administration of domestic affairs,<sup>361</sup> again as most people do. Yet I have heard a few people arguing the opposite.<sup>362</sup> The reasons they put forward are these. Accepting the

<sup>357</sup> As happened in the law of 12 May 1497, introduced during del Nero's gonfalonierate, which decreed that captains of fortresses were to be proposed by an increased number of nominators and elected by a simple majority, while the named captains were to be imborsed and drawn by lot after election in the Council. See Cadoni, *Storia e politica*, 23 (1984), pp. 674–75; cf. Rubinstein, 'I primi anni', p. 340.

<sup>358</sup> A proposes *doppia tratta* to keep the people happy for some offices, 'for example, for some of the weightier offices like the Signoria'. In the law of 12 May 1497, election to the major internal offices was left unchanged, while some external offices were to be chosen by a double vote. See Glossary under Electoral procedures, and note 359 below.

<sup>359</sup> According to the *History of Florence*, pp. 127–9, however, del Nero in fact opposed the law allowing elections by most votes, intended as a solution to the stalemate created by negative voting (see below), by which he had hoped to undermine the Great Council, the law of 12 May being introduced by him 'as a lesser evil'.

<sup>360</sup> The passage from 'I would also make the fortresses' to here is expressed more succinctly in A: that 'although it would be better to elect all the other offices by majority vote, yet if it was necessary to content the populace by making them more open, for example weightier offices like the Signoria, a certain number of those with most votes should be imborsed [their name-tickets were put into bags] and then the other lower and less important ones should be drawn by lot; all those winning the vote by a simple majority should be imborsed'.

<sup>361</sup> *el governo di dentro*.

<sup>362</sup> Notably Machiavelli, in the *Discourses*, bk. 1, ch. 4, ed. and tr. Walker, pp. 218–19: 'since good examples proceed from good education, good education from good laws



premise – which no one denies or can deny – that its army was good, it has to be admitted that the city had good laws, otherwise the organisation of military affairs could not have been good. This is also shown by the fact that it wasn't only in the army, but in every other worthy activity, that Rome displayed innumerable examples of the greatest prowess. This could not have happened if upbringing<sup>363</sup> hadn't been good, and this cannot be good where the laws are not good and well observed: so where they are, the government cannot be badly instituted. Thus it follows that these conflicts between the senators and the plebs, and between the consuls and the tribunes, appeared to be more frightening than they were in fact, and the disorder they created did not destabilise the republic in fundamental matters.

Then, since the senate was small in number and the people huge, the Romans had to resolve either not to use the people in their wars, which would have deprived them of the chance of creating that great empire of theirs; or, if they wanted to be able to control them, to be fairly tolerant and allow them to let off their spirits<sup>364</sup> – which were directed only towards defending themselves from oppression by the very powerful, and protecting common liberty. And if one reads it aright, from the deposition of the Kings until the time of the Gracchi,<sup>365</sup> although they created a great uproar, few citizens were hurt and they never fought between themselves. No one denies that it would have been better if a way had been found of using the people in war without them running riot. But since it is impossible in human affairs to have something that's completely good without it bringing with it harm, we must call good everything that contains incomparably more good than harm. This was the case in Rome's government, where its ills and disorders sprang more from the fact that nothing is totally pure by nature than from any deficiency in their constitution. The office of the tribunes,<sup>366</sup> which is especially condemned by those who criticise the Roman government, apart from defending the people from oppression by the nobles, as we said, was a watchdog of

and good laws in this case . . . ', *The Prince*, ch. 12, ed. and tr. Q. Skinner and R. Prince, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 42–3.

<sup>363</sup> *educazione*, meaning 'firm conditioning' in a wide sense.

<sup>364</sup> *umori*.

<sup>365</sup> Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus: see Biographical notes.

<sup>366</sup> The Tribune of the Plebs, consisting by 449 BC of ten officers.

common liberty – both through its power to propose new laws to the people and to intercede, and much more through its indictments, which are extremely useful in a free city, since they attack harmful citizens and strike great terror into everyone who thinks of plotting against liberty and living against the laws. For if one waits for crimes to be punished, without someone to bring them to light and someone to hunt them down, it is often done too late and always carelessly. This is perhaps a failing in your government, because in planning it, you haven't thought of ways to encourage or force men to do this. In addition, the tribunes, or an office like them, might perhaps be useful in controlling the senate, which could desire to arrogate too much power to itself and to think continually of increasing it – especially since, as you've said, there is always a certain difference of opinion between it and the populace, making it necessary to find some way of moderating whichever of the two has the most means of oppressing the other. All this I wanted to say to give you the chance of talking much more about government and of learning whose opinion is the best.

**BERNARDO** I don't want to comment on your modesty, to avoid wasting time on ceremonies. So coming straight to the point, let me say that I agree with you, and everyone else, that the military organisation of the Romans, which was the foundation of their greatness, was extremely well set up. I also think that the administration of their domestic affairs was so disorderly and turbulent that without their military vigour and prowess, their republic would have collapsed many times. In my opinion this was due to the fact that it was badly instituted, and the very arguments you use to excuse it, by explaining these bad features as an inevitable side-effect of its seeking a greater good,<sup>367</sup> in my opinion bear out the truth of what I say.

The factiousness of the Romans that we discussed stemmed principally from one cause, that is, the division of the city into separate orders: part of it patricians, the other plebeians, with the government organised so that offices and honours were reserved only for the patricians, and the plebeians were excluded by law. Thus one could say that part of the city were masters, the other part slaves. This alone,

<sup>367</sup> lit. 'attributing it to necessity caused by an objective of greater good'. Cf. the *Considerations* ch. 4 (translated by Grayson, in *Selected Writings*, Oxford, 1965, p. 68), which refer to his earlier criticism of Machiavelli's argument 'that disunity of the plebs and the Roman senate made that republic free and powerful'.

perhaps, would have been insufficient to give rise to the discords that developed. For although the plebs were undoubtedly greater in number, those of them who aspired to govern and enjoy these honours were a smaller number; being a minority, they would have been insufficient to come into disagreement with the patricians. However, an additional stimulus that encouraged the lowest plebs to rise up was that the patricians didn't exercise their authority with moderation. On the contrary, they began to abuse the plebs and squeeze them over legal matters – as over the payments of debts, where they were not content to deprive them of their possessions but forced their persons into the hands of their creditors. This harsh behaviour provided the leading plebs with the opportunity of drawing the lower plebs to their way of thinking and, after forming into a single body for this purpose, of working for new laws dealing with debts and making the plebs eligible for office – which were mostly proposed under the pretence that the lower plebs would never be able to protect themselves from abuse<sup>368</sup> if their members didn't enter the government. Since men's minds are always at work increasing personal comforts and never resting content with first plans, in the course of time the plebs added to this list the desire to share out the possessions that initially had been public property.<sup>369</sup> However, this was the last incentive, for the matter of the debts which forced men into servitude was more pressing than the desire to divide up the possessions held by others; and this is according to the natural order of things, first to think of preserving your own and then to occupy what belongs to others.

These laws were not instituted when the city became a republic;<sup>370</sup> they were born with the city and existed in the time of the Kings. For the patricians were distinguished from the plebs right from the beginning, and the senate participated with the King in governing the republic – since the King consulted it over all important matters – before the time of Tarquinius Superbus, who did more than his predecessors to transform the kingdom to a tyranny.<sup>371</sup> There were many reasons why this division didn't cause disorder at that time.

<sup>368</sup> Here and subsequently I have translated *iniuria* as abuse, to suggest injustice as well as physical injury.

<sup>369</sup> *del publico*; A: *delle comunità*.

<sup>370</sup> *non nascono di nuovo al tempo della libertà*.

<sup>371</sup> Traditionally the last King of Rome, 534–510 BC.

First, because the King, who enjoyed more authority than anyone else, did not allow the plebs to be abused in any way; instead he tried to keep them content – indeed, some Kings were overambitious<sup>372</sup> in the way they treated the plebs. But at least they prevented abuse, and if they saw the plebs suffering some calamity through ill fortune they did what they could to help them.

One reads that Servius, who paid the debts of the poor from his own pocket, distributed the public possessions that had been usurped by the powerful and ordered that the taxes, which before had been imposed equally on the poor and the rich, should be distributed according to men's means – as well as passing many other fair laws.<sup>373</sup> Since the Kings defended the plebs from abuse and were accustomed to help them in their need, the plebs had no reason to want to participate in the government, which is a stimulus that only moves men of greater worth. After the expulsion of the Kings, when the people were able to appoint either patricians or plebs as tribunes with consular powers, the plebs themselves always elected patricians.<sup>374</sup> When those tribunes who held office for so long finally published new laws on debts, on possessions and on the consulate, the plebs would have approved the first two and rejected the last, had they voted on them separately;<sup>375</sup> and unless the law had insisted that a member of the plebs had always to be a consul, they would not have been eventually encouraged to try to win these honours.

So at the time of the Kings, the plebs did not protest about being excluded from these offices because they were protected against abuse – all the less, because, as it was the king on whom decisions ultimately depended,<sup>376</sup> participation in the government did not bestow as much authority, nor was it valued as much, as later, in the time of liberty. In addition, the King often put plebs into the senate,<sup>377</sup> so that the most worthy hoped to be able to become patricians. Thus

<sup>372</sup> A: 'abused their power', *prevaricorno*.

<sup>373</sup> According to Livy, (t, 43), who describes Servius Tullius (trad. 578–535 BC) as the King who introduced the census, which shifted financial burdens from the poor to the rich.

<sup>374</sup> Machiavelli makes this point in the *Discourses*, bk. 1, ch. 47, ed. and tr. Walker, vol. 1, p. 317.

<sup>375</sup> Here using A, *arebbe vinto quelle due . . . a partito separatamente* with B: *vinceva le prime . . . a partito separate*.

<sup>376</sup> B: 'was in charge of the shop', *maestro della bottega*.

<sup>377</sup> Following A: *senatori* rather than B: *patrizi*.

the city were young, since it would be more malleable<sup>383</sup> and its fortune would not yet have played itself out.

But returning to the subject, you can see what caused the sedition in Rome. This was the fact that by far the greater part of the city, without which, being totally based on arms, it could not make war, found itself in a bad way. One can't deny the magnitude of the problem: to institute a government which could be said to need everyone, but which practically everyone with good reason disliked. The right method would have been to ensure that the city formed a single body by abolishing the distinction between the patricians' and the plebs' share in government. Had they been united in this way, there would have been no further reason for the abuses, nor would there have been any need to encourage the people to riot in order to gain access to the government. The truth of this is shown by the fact that, after the consulate and other offices were opened to the plebs and creditors were less strict over debts,<sup>384</sup> the city was tranquil for hundreds of years until the riots at the time of the Gracchi, which had a different cause; and the tribunes of the plebs, which was initially a very disorderly office, were reasonably quiet, either because the leading plebs, once they were eligible for government, had no reason to stir up trouble, or if they had, they failed to get the support of the others, who were not in need. The reason given by Piero Guicciardini is as good as any in explaining why the Roman government had to behave as it did. For if they wanted to use the plebs to fight, they had to keep them happy; or if they wanted to keep them unhappy, they would have needed to abandon the trend towards having a citizen army. But because the patricians, wanting to keep the honours for themselves, were unwilling to do this, and on the other hand they didn't think about or know how to find a way of protecting the plebs from abuse, or of enabling the leading plebeians to be drawn occasionally for the senate,<sup>385</sup> the divisions began. These were so serious, as I said at the beginning, that had their military organisation not been so effective, the city would undoubtedly have been ruined by this turbulent existence.

<sup>383</sup> lit. 'to receive impressions'.

<sup>384</sup> lit. 'the severity of creditors was moderated'.

<sup>385</sup> *ne' patrizi*.

time the veto was never used, unless either at the request of private individuals, who bought the tribune's 'no' for their own benefit, or if they asserted it on their own account, they did so owing to erroneous opinions or gossip. What was useful about their right to make indictments we'll discuss below, but it isn't to be compared to the damage I have mentioned; and none of it would have happened if the plebs had been given at the start, when the Kings were first expelled, the share they later won in government, because they wouldn't then have thought of creating the tribunes.

Piero said that the fact military affairs were well ordered was a sign that the laws were good. I would reply that – unless I'm mistaken – my arguments are so clear that it isn't necessary to look for 'signs' when the results are tangible. But let's take this further. The army was established by the Kings and, in effect, can be said to have originated at the same time as the city; had it been necessary to institute it during those tumultuous times that several times nearly destroyed the city, it would never have been instituted. Since Rome was used to having a trained militia in the city and men had no trade<sup>396</sup> other than fighting, it was less difficult to keep it than it might have been. All the more so because no new city ever sprang up surrounded by greater hatred and envy, which never ceased to grow; being surrounded by neighbours who were armed and extremely hostile, there was never any opportunity of letting the army become slacker. Nor have I criticised all Roman laws. On the contrary, apart from praising their army, I admire their customs, which were admirable and sacred, their appetite for true glory, their burning love for their country, and many virtues that were far more numerous in this city than any other. The disturbances didn't arise because the government was badly ordered in the areas mentioned above, for the sedition was never so extreme that it destroyed all the blessings enjoyed by the city. Nor was the political life of those times as corrupt as it later became, especially as the city was poor and surrounded by enemies who prevented it from succumbing to delights and pleasures. I think, in fact, that it was not so much its good laws as men's nature and the rigour of those ancient times – especially in that part of Italy more renowned for this than elsewhere – which produced such outstanding virtues and customs, and kept it for so long quite uncorrupted by vice. In

<sup>396</sup> *essendovi la città abituata drento . . . bottega.*

seem fine and good, but in practice turn out to have some defect that one would never have dreamt of. So although my objectives are good, I think I may be somewhat mistaken about the means I have proposed,<sup>401</sup> which would need modifying and correcting on the basis of lessons learnt from experience and chance. For the same reason, I think this government may not produce as many blessings as are proposed, nor so much protection and concord as is designed, especially since in the things of this world there is naturally always some counter-balance. However, all in all, I feel certain that this would be the best of all the governments this city is capable of having; and if the results are not totally good, at least the main ones – and enough of them – will be such that men of a moderate and tranquil disposition will be satisfied. For the wise, it's enough to have most things the way they want, since it is impossible to have them all.

CAPPONI This is an excellent conclusion, and very true, as the whole of your discussion has been. If we adopted such laws, there's no doubt that the results to be hoped for would be extremely useful. But I'd like to know your opinion about this: in view of the huge storms gathering over Italy – as you have described them – should we, in addition to trying to recover Pisa, once Pisa was recovered, take the opportunity – if it offered itself – of increasing our dominion through these ultramontanes, either with money or other means? Or should we decline it, to avoid drawing new humours down on us in such strange times?

BERNARDO If you asked me what would be better for a city, to live content with its freedom, if it could be enjoyed without wanting dominion, as many towns in Germany do today, or to think about creating an empire, I know what my answer would be. But your question is different, because we're among those who exercise dominion. And since we've always gone down this path since acquiring power,<sup>402</sup> and can't any longer retreat from it, if a clear-cut opportunity arose, that is, one not involving us in war or difficulties, I cannot in ordinary circumstances criticise taking it. And if I was certain that Italy would soon be able to remain in Italian hands, I would say there was nothing to worry about, since the acquisition of Lucca or Siena now would be just as praiseworthy as acquiring Pisa

<sup>401</sup> *qualche fallacia ne' modi.*

<sup>402</sup> *abbiamo avuto forze.*

and Arezzo was in the time of our ancestors.<sup>403</sup> With only Italian powers left in Italy, you wouldn't need to fear whether you would be able to keep what you had acquired. And even if you incurred envy, it couldn't do much damage, since you'd find it easy to defend yourself from your equals. For no one is so much stronger than us that we couldn't, with some support from others – which, having to do with Italians, we'd never lack – look them in the face.

It is true that if these great ultramontane powers come to dominate Italy,<sup>404</sup> it will, I think, be easier to preserve a power the size of yours than a greater one. For not being so great that they need fear you, you will protect yourselves better than if you were greater; they can be satisfied with profiting from you by taking your money. But the more eminent powers<sup>405</sup> will need to think of reducing these other ones, in order to remove whoever might obstruct them in Italy. Therefore they will try to destroy them totally or curb them, so these states will suffer far more than the ones they will only have thought of profiting from. Thus if we see the ultramontane powers establishing themselves in Italy, as I expect, I don't know if I'd recommend thinking of expansion. You couldn't get enough to make you safe from such vast powers,<sup>406</sup> especially in view of the fact that you can't acquire anything important that wouldn't be very difficult to keep, since the city is situated in a very inconvenient place for expansion.

You have the Church as a close neighbour, which is too big in comparison with you and enjoys a reverence and authority that never dies.<sup>407</sup> If sometimes one of its rights is so antiquated that it seems to be forgotten, times change and its right springs up again, fresher and more powerful than ever.<sup>408</sup> On the other hand, there is no place in Tuscany so small that it has never enjoyed independence and that almost to this day does not long for liberty. Leaving aside Arezzo and Pisa, both of whom seem to have some reason to retain their memory of sovereignty<sup>409</sup> – Arezzo because of its antiquity and Pisa

<sup>403</sup> In 1406 and 1384 respectively.

<sup>404</sup> Principally France, Germany and Spain, who after Charles VIII's initial expedition in 1494 all remained involved in Italian politics until the fall of the Florentine republic in 1530.

<sup>405</sup> *grandezze più eminenti*, i.e. the ultramontanes.

<sup>406</sup> *potenzie sì grosse*, A and B: 'such fat fish'.

<sup>407</sup> Cf. Appendix Maxim 29.

<sup>408</sup> On Guicciardini's personal experience of reinforcing the rights of the Church as governor of Modena, see Cavallar, *Francesco Guicciardini Giurista*, pp. 271–8.

<sup>409</sup> *del dominare*.



for its modern power – even Prato and San Gimignano are not averse to this idea of freedom. Where it has taken root, it is impossible to rule except by force, and every disturbance breeds infinite difficulties. So our ancestors have had the greatest trouble in creating and preserving this dominion of ours, and to us it is the greatest hindrance.<sup>410</sup> For if we had had as neighbours people accustomed to living under someone else, whether a republic or a prince, whom at any rate they had to serve, they would not have been so determined to resist being our subjects. Nor would a prince or a republic, or anyone from whom we had taken something, have retaken it with the facility of the Church, and at least their rights with time would have become antiquated and totally worthless.

The Venetians haven't had these difficulties, since their state on the terra firma never had to uproot liberty, and they have not had the Church as a neighbour.<sup>411</sup> So the small dominion you have acquired in Tuscany is more amazing than their great one in Lombardy. For this and other reasons, if the ultramontanes stay in Italy as I believe they will, I would urge you, once you have reacquired Pisa, to keep what you've got. Yet acquisition is so sweet and the play of fortune in the world<sup>412</sup> is such that even the wisest men are nearly always wrong when they judge the outcome of particular events. Men often imagine that something is bound to go one way, when just the reverse happens. Therefore when the evil they fear isn't very close or very certain, and by comparison the blessing they have a chance of attaining isn't minimal,<sup>413</sup> anyone who lets it go, loses it – only to find that what one feared often doesn't materialise, so the chance of a certain good is lost on account of a vain fear. For this reason, if the present crisis in Italy continues, I would dare to make a definite rule only in one particular instance: that you abstain from any acquisitive ventures that aren't very cut and dried and won't later imperil you and cause trouble. In all other cases, you should act as the quality of the times and chance allow.

**SODERINI** We have other problems to think about now, because we suffer from two mortal wounds: the loss of Pisa and the Medici

<sup>410</sup> i.e. as A explains, 'not having as neighbours other than the Church or freedoms, or if you like peoples [popular communes]'.  
<sup>411</sup> Cf. Appendix Maxim 29.

<sup>412</sup> *accidenti del mondo*.

<sup>413</sup> A adds 'compared to an evil'.

exiles, who, because of the friends they have in Florence and in the dominion, and because of the great reputation of their family, will give us work enough to do.<sup>414</sup> As we've heard what you think about Pisa, I'd like you to give us a few reminders<sup>415</sup> about how we should deal with the affairs of the Medici.

**BERNARDO** Both these wounds are serious, but the Medici wound is worse. Many things could happen that would terminate the Pisa business unexpectedly soon,<sup>416</sup> whereas very few could prevent the Medici threat from lasting many years; also the Medici sickness is internal and affects our vital parts. Concerning Pisa, I refer to what I said earlier, adding that this sickness is difficult to cure and has need of strong medicines and, to speak plainly,<sup>417</sup> cruelty. Although perhaps a prince or a one-man regime would be prepared to use cruelty, a popular government would be extremely opposed to doing so. The Pisans are our inveterate enemies and we have no hope of ever taking them except by force. Therefore one would need always to murder all the Pisans captured in the war, to decrease the number of our enemies and make the rest more timid, and if they did the same to you with yours, it would be little loss, since you would acquire others with money. Or at least you should imprison them in such a way that they would have little hope of coming out until you had recovered Pisa. For if you begin by behaving according to the normal methods of warfare in Italy, with ransoms and exchange of prisoners, you would nourish a war that lasted much longer than you wanted. Whereas if you dealt with this matter effectively by murdering or imprisoning them all, or murdering some of them and imprisoning some, according to what seemed best as things developed, but never let any of them go, it would make them so cowardly that this undertaking would be considerably facilitated.

The last defeat the Pisans suffered at the hands of the Genoese at Meloria<sup>418</sup> affected them so badly that Pisa never recovered its vigour. The reason for this was that the Genoese never released any of their prisoners, who were extremely numerous. As a result Pisa

<sup>414</sup> A adds 'because everyone who wants to upset us would do so under the pretext of restoring the Medici'

<sup>415</sup> *qualche ricordo*.

<sup>416</sup> It in fact surrendered on 8 June 1509. See Butters, *Governors and Government*, p. 137.

<sup>417</sup> *in vulgare*.

<sup>418</sup> In 1284.

not only could never benefit again from the prisoners who died in prison, but it also lost their progeny, who would have been born had they been in Pisa. If it were said that by doing this one would acquire a name for cruelty and also lack of conscience,<sup>419</sup> I would admit to both; but I would go on to say that anyone who wants to hold dominions and states in this day and age should show mercy and kindness where possible, and where there is no other alternative, one must use cruelty and unscrupulousness. For this reason your great-uncle Gino wrote in those last memoirs of his,<sup>420</sup> that it was necessary to appoint as members of the Ten of War people who loved their country more than their soul,<sup>421</sup> because it is impossible to control governments and states,<sup>422</sup> if one wants to hold them as they are held today, according to the precepts of Christian law.

How can one, according to conscience, wage war from a lust to expand one's territory, in which one commits so many killings, so many sackings, so many violations of women, so many burnings of houses and churches, and an infinite number of other evils? Nevertheless, if someone stood up in a senate and argued, for this reason and for this reason alone, against undertaking some entirely feasible and useful enterprise, he would be repudiated<sup>423</sup> by everyone. Let's take this further. How could you, according to conscience, accept a war in order to defend even the lands you already possess? Indeed, although no one has waged war on you and no one has asked for war, how can you keep your territory, which contains, if you think carefully about it, perhaps nothing that belongs to you, since you have occupied it all, or at least most of it, by force of arms, or by buying it from someone who had no right to it?<sup>424</sup> The same is true for everyone else, because if one thinks about it carefully, all states are illegitimate;<sup>425</sup> and excepting republics, inside their own city

<sup>419</sup> lit. *poca coscienza*.

<sup>420</sup> Gino di Neri Capponi: see Biographical notes. His maxim is discussed by G. Tognatti, 'Amare la patria più che l'anima'. Contributo circa la genesi di un atteggiamento religioso', in *Studi sul medioevo cristiano offerti a R. Morghen*, vol. II, Rome, 1974, pp. 1011-26.

<sup>421</sup> A: 'conscience'.

<sup>422</sup> *governi e stati*; B: *e' governi degli stati*.

<sup>423</sup> B: 'made fun of', *uccellato*.

<sup>424</sup> Cf. Cavallar, *Francesco Guicciardini Giurista*, pp. 123-4 for a discussion of the role of the Florentine dominion in Guicciardini's legal and political thinking.

<sup>425</sup> *violenti*: see Glossary under *governi*.

walls<sup>426</sup> and not beyond them, there is no power whatsoever that is legitimate, even less that of the Emperor, who enjoys such authority that he administers justice to others. Nor do I exempt priests from this rule, for their rule is doubly illegitimate, since to keep us under they use spiritual weapons as well as temporal ones.<sup>427</sup>

You see the position to which someone who wanted to govern states strictly according to conscience would be reduced. Therefore when I talked of murdering or keeping the Pisans imprisoned, I didn't perhaps talk as a Christian: I talked according to the reason and practice of states. Nor will anyone be more of a Christian who rejects such cruelty but recommends doing everything possible to take Pisa, since this means in effect being the cause of infinite evils to occupy something that doesn't according to conscience belong to you. Anyone who doesn't acknowledge this has no excuse before God, because – as the friars like to say – it shows 'crass ignorance'.<sup>428</sup> Anyone who does recognise it cannot say it is reasonable to listen to one's conscience in one case and to disregard it in the other. I wanted to say this not to pronounce a verdict on these difficulties, which are immense, since anyone who wants to live totally according to God's will can ill afford not to<sup>429</sup> remove himself totally from the affairs of this world, and it is difficult to live in the world without offending God.<sup>430</sup> I did so in order to talk realistically about things as they are in fact, since chance has drawn us into this discussion. We can cope with this argument among ourselves, but we shouldn't, however, use it with others, nor where there were more people.

But let's return to the topic that remains to be discussed, that is, the Medici situation. The remedies to make yourselves totally secure from them, so you would have no trouble from them for a time at least, are few and insufficient. To discover better what they are, we must first consider the source of these dangers. The Medici family have been the bosses in control of this state for the last sixty years, and their power is famous not only throughout the whole of Italy, but also beyond the Alps. This has several consequences. First, they inevitably have many friends in the city and in the dominion, since

<sup>426</sup> *patria*.

<sup>427</sup> Cf. Appendix, Maxim 48.

<sup>428</sup> *una ignoranza crassa*.

<sup>429</sup> B: 'must'.

<sup>430</sup> A: 'who wants to live according to the world must offend God'.

during this period they have had dealings with, and favoured, many people in different ways. These people, it is to be feared, would be only too happy to manipulate every situation they thought could help the Medici to return to Florence. In exactly the same position, and even keener, are all those who find themselves worse off, with regard to either political or paid offices,<sup>431</sup> as a result of their expulsion.

Second, because of the great reputation this family has enjoyed for so many years, it is widely believed by all rulers<sup>432</sup> that the Medici have more friends and partisans in Florence and our dominion than they really have. Therefore everyone who wants to upset our city and wage war with us will use them as instruments and, as they say, 'as a lure'. They will make a show of wanting to restore them, hoping through them to cause discord in Florence and stimulate uprisings and rebellions in the dominion. Indeed, there will be those who really will undertake this task, moved either by a design to use this opportunity to dismember part of our state, or to profit from us in some other way. Someone who wouldn't normally dream of fighting us, not being confident he could hurt us, now seeing this open wound will turn his mind to it, stimulated either by them or through his own inclination.

Third, and this is considerably more important, although in a city everyone ought to love liberty and be enemies of tyrants, there are nonetheless friends of tyranny in every city – quite apart from their clients and partisans. Many of them are young people who want to live without constraints and are unwilling to be reduced to living under the equality of the law. In Rome, after the expulsion of the Tarquins, many young men conspired against freedom, including the sons of Brutus, who had expelled them. Many criminals have the same feelings, because they have frequently used their power to protect themselves from the rule of law. Anyone who lives by arms is in the same position, because he is privy to the tyrant and often enjoys some reward or favour. The plebeians, too, very often have a liking for him, because if the tyrant has any intelligence, he always pays attention to grain supplies and often indulges them with festivals, jousts and public games; they like the magnificence of his house and court, which are the things that appeal to the lowest classes. What

<sup>431</sup> B: 'all those whose financial or political position depends so much on the Medici that they thought it had deteriorated'.

<sup>432</sup> *principi*.

matters most of all and makes him more important friends is that he draws the support of all those who become discontented with the regime in power, either through ambition or through being abused. Because they have nowhere else to turn, if the present regime is a free republic,<sup>433</sup> they turn their thoughts to tyranny. As it is very difficult to make a tyrant out of new men, since they lack reputation and old foundations, and men are very unwilling to support someone unused to being their superior, they throw themselves at the old tyrant – and if he is dead, at his sons and descendants and whoever remains of their stock, which has assumed a status that seems somehow to be theirs of right. Men are not ashamed to serve someone who himself, or whose ancestors, have commanded them at another time; and all those who have been employed or helped by him or his forbears hope to revert to the same situation. Therefore one often sees the blood-relations of the old tyrant being not only welcomed by such men when they offer themselves, but also sought out by those who want a tyranny, at a time when they themselves have no thought or hope of it at all.

In 1478, when Giuliano had been murdered and Lorenzo was wounded and in danger of death,<sup>434</sup> those of us who wanted a regime like theirs thought of turning to Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco, in case Lorenzo died, because he was closest to him<sup>435</sup> – despite the fact that because of his age he didn't aspire to such things.<sup>436</sup> In Bologna, on the death of Annibale Bentivoglio, the leaders of his party removed Santi from the Lana Guild in Florence to make him head of state. He was a young man who was thought by everyone to be a son of someone from Poppi, but they gave everyone to believe he was the bastard son of Ercole<sup>437</sup> Bentivoglio. He himself not only didn't think of such a thing but knew nothing about it, so that to get him they had to beseech your grandfather, Neri di Gino, to act on their

<sup>433</sup> *libero*.

<sup>434</sup> As a result of the Pazzi Conspiracy; see above.

<sup>435</sup> B: 'the closest'; A: 'the closest to Lorenzo'.

<sup>436</sup> In 1478 Lorenzo was only fifteen years old. On him and his father Pierfrancesco de' Medici, Cosimo's nephew, see A. Brown, 'Pierfrancesco de' Medici, 1430–1476', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 42 (1979), esp. p. 102, (referring to this passage), repr. in Brown, *The Medici in Florence: The Exercise and Language of Power*, Florence, 1992, p. 85. In the *History of Florence*, p. 127, Guicciardini says that in 1497 del Nero wanted 'a narrow government of men of worth' headed by Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco, rather than by Piero di Lorenzo.

<sup>437</sup> B: 'of one of the'.

its happening in a republic, which lacks the careful attention and the secrecy, as well as that alacrity in its ministers, necessary to deal with such situations – where tyrants are much better than others at knowing what to do and doing it. You've successfully put a price on their heads,<sup>441</sup> but this is a fruitless form of persecution that very rarely has any effect. Yet if anyone pleaded it was a matter of conscience, if it is against one's conscience to organise their murders with special care and precision, it is also morally wrong<sup>442</sup> to provide the occasion and encourage men with these prices. In short, this remedy, in my opinion, will not succeed because of the nature of the government and also, perhaps, because divine justice<sup>443</sup> won't permit them to be punished by death when they have put no one to death. As you know, neither Cosimo nor anyone else in the family ever used such cruelty against exiles and other enemies, despite having at different times many enemies, and important ones too.

The second remedy is to confiscate their goods<sup>444</sup> and persecute them in every way that will impoverish them, since the fewer goods they possess, the less their reputation and power of doing harm will be. Nevertheless, this remedy won't be totally successful, because usually those who support tyrants, inside or outside the city, aren't moved by their riches but by the objectives I have already mentioned, which don't depend on the tyrant's<sup>445</sup> wealth or poverty. It's true that a rich tyrant enjoys more reputation; he can moreover support his friends with his money; having access to those who stand high in the favour of princes, they can send messengers hither and thither, keep spies, and afford all the expenses that are necessary to anyone involved in political negotiations. Anyone unable to do all this lacks many advantages and loses many opportunities, for sometimes occasions arise when the tyrant,<sup>446</sup> having several thousand ducats to spend on raising troops, is offered the chance of an easy venture,

<sup>441</sup> A price of 2,000 florins had been placed on Piero's head on 12 November 1494 (and on his brother Giuliano's), increased to 4,000 florins on 15 October 1495, and extended to his heirs on 26 November 1495, ASF *Signori Deliberazioni* ord.aut.96, fo.90r, *Provisioni* 186, fos.120r, 142r. Cf. n. 457 below.

<sup>442</sup> lit. 'illicit'.

<sup>443</sup> A: 'God'.

<sup>444</sup> *roba*, which in what follows I distinguish from 'possessions' (*beni* and *possessioni*), meaning landed as well as other wealth.

<sup>445</sup> Following A; B: 'his'.

<sup>446</sup> Following A; B and C: 'he'.

against the state, as well as providing the help of embassies and news, all of which are harmful to the republic. So removing these opportunities or conveniences also provides another way of damaging them.

The fourth remedy – and after the first one, it is the best and depends entirely on ourselves – is to introduce in the city a good, well-ordered government, which would cut off all their hopes at the root. You wouldn't have to fear that under such a government the well-qualified citizens would become their friends, for the city wouldn't be divided, nor would their standing in it be so bad that they had to rush to hand over their power to one of their former enemies or to someone on whom they had been dependent. On the contrary, you have to hope that under a well-formed government most of the Medici friends would forget them and would be very happy in a republican regime,<sup>453</sup> since, as you know, most of them are people of good standing, almost the elite<sup>454</sup> of the city – as those usually are who have been friends of a narrow regime that has lasted a long time. For they have become enriched and ennobled by the favour they have been shown, and they have gained reputation and experience from playing an active part in its affairs. So they will always stand out among others, not only for their wealth and credit, but also for their ability and brains. A good government will also stabilise the feelings of the subject population, for the subjects are usually emboldened if their lords enjoy little reputation or are in disorder. A government that acquires the reputation among princes of being unified and wisely governed will make them more hesitant about supporting the Medici, for they won't be confident that they can easily assault a state which behaves prudently.

If anyone in the city does favour them, apart from the likelihood that they will be people of little quality, they either won't dare to show themselves, or if they do show themselves, they will be easily held in check<sup>455</sup> because there will be effective laws to provide for such problems. For if these are taken care of from the beginning, apart from not becoming dangerous, they upset the city much less by not reaching the point of bloodshed and exiles, which are very harmful to republics and states. For although chopping off a head

<sup>453</sup> *vere civile*.

<sup>454</sup> lit. 'the flower'.

<sup>455</sup> A and B: 'they will be ruined.'



gets rid of that person, you replace him with many malcontents, not only making his supporters into enemies but ultimately upsetting all men of moderate views; and if you send someone into exile, you increase the number of those who always try to stir up bad feeling<sup>456</sup> against the city. Both reduce the government's reputation, because word gets abroad that you are disunited and this favours the tyrant. Thus among the other ways a good government can damage him is this, to have the means of repressing the malcontents without using strong medicine, which those who control the state should never use except as a last resort.

The fifth remedy, which can only be adopted by a good government, is in the course of time to restore all or part of their goods to them, on condition that they adhere to certain boundaries and that they don't stir up trouble against the city, which is similar to the terms you agreed with the King of France: that Piero should enjoy his possessions provided he did not come within one hundred miles of Florentine territory, under pain of losing them.<sup>457</sup> But this agreement did not last, because on your side it was agreed to under compulsion, not by choice, and for Piero it was at the wrong moment.<sup>458</sup> When the tyrant has been expelled and has to stay outside the city for some time, for the reasons given already, he is fired with the hope of returning. Then, through the sole desire to enjoy his goods, he would not stop in his tracks, nor would it be the right moment to restore them to him, since it is necessary to wait until he is impoverished and make him come begging. But when he's been knocked about a bit, has used up what he was lent and has exhausted his friends, he sees that his attempts have failed, that princes have taken no notice of him or made him an object of barter and profited from him,<sup>459</sup> and that men have failed him. So he is reduced to hopelessness, not knowing what he should do, and begins to think more about how to survive than about returning home. That is the moment when, if the government was well established and ordered, I would not be averse to offering him the opportunity of enjoying his posses-

<sup>456</sup> *umori*.

<sup>457</sup> Charles VIII. In the treaty of 25 November 1494 (published in *Archivio storico italiano*, 1842, pp. 370-5, ¶ 16-19), Florence agreed to revoke the price on Piero's head as a rebel with the conditions referred to here.

<sup>458</sup> *fuora della sua stagione*, A: *fuora di tempo*.

<sup>459</sup> *n'hanno fatto mercatanzia*; B: 'made fun of', *lo hanno uccellato*.

sions, on condition he would be deprived of them if he ever approached the city within the limits you assigned him, or if he seemed to be plotting anything else.

The fear of losing his goods would be insufficient to hold the tyrant back if he saw an alternative that seemed very promising, for goods matter little compared with one's country and political power.<sup>460</sup> But at any other time it would be a sufficiently strong sanction. It would prevent him from spending all his time whispering into the ears of princes, urging them to embark on ventures for him. Nor would he let himself be aroused by them, except where he saw a very good chance of success. So with this method you wouldn't be totally secure, but you would free yourselves from the many expenses and troubles he would give you if he was desperate – apart from that fact that to restrain him from ventures is always a good thing, because they sometimes begin by seeming hopeless, and then in the course of time opportunities arise that favour them and bring them success and encouragement.

After this expedient one could go further, but it would take time: your government would need to be firmly established and in good repute, and their affairs reduced and in a worse condition. That is, one could restore them to the city as private citizens; and if they daren't return to it, they would entirely lose their credit abroad. If they did return, there is no doubt that if the government was good, everyone would regard them as private citizens, and they would have to live privately and quietly because of the government's authority. In this way, they would either remain without renown inside the city and outside, no longer tyrants but citizens, and everyone would be clear that they had no party there. Or if they couldn't tolerate life as private citizens, they would return abroad of their own accord, but so reduced in credit that they could be said to be destroyed: if this happened, it would be an excellent way of extinguishing them. Nevertheless this is a new way of doing things, and since it is a matter of extreme importance, I wouldn't insist on it but simply propose it, reminding you that before any decision was taken, one should examine carefully the nature of the times, the condition of the city and all the other matters, which in such a serious affair are considerable. But by now it's getting late, so I suggest, if you agree, that we go to

<sup>460</sup> *patria . . . stato.*

dine, and if there is anything else to say, we can go on talking later.

CAPPONI I think that's a good idea, because we want to make our way towards Florence, where, thanks to your kindness, we shall return so well instructed that we'll have good reason always to remember this visit.

GUICCIARDINI I'm the one you should partly thank, since it was I who suggested this discussion.

SODERINI You too, if you like, but the debt we all owe to Bernardo is infinite.<sup>461</sup> For yesterday and today he has delivered a lecture to us which is so lucid and so wise, that it will enlighten us in these extremely important matters for the whole of our lives. May God give both him and us grace, that we may be able to make all our citizens understand them, so that before we die we may see such an embellishment and such a blessing<sup>462</sup> introduced in our city.

<sup>461</sup> A adds, in a cancelled passage, 'whom I have always considered extremely wise, but yesterday and today, may God help me in all my deeds, he has seemed to me a miracle'.

<sup>462</sup> *ornamento . . . bene.*

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## Appendix: selected maxims

Although Guicciardini's *Maxims* or *Ricordi* have been translated in two editions, by Margaret Grayson in F. Guicciardini, *Selected Writings*, London, 1965, pp. 1–56, and by Mario Domandi, *Maxims and Reflections (Ricordi)*, Philadelphia, 1965, I have re-translated some which relate directly to topics discussed in the *Dialogue*, using the critical edition of R. Spongano, *Ricordi*, Florence, 1951 and adopting his numeration. The relationship of the five redactions of these *Ricordi* – the first two written while he was on embassy in Spain in 1512, B in 1528 and C in 1530 (A being a composite version) – is discussed by M. Phillips, *Francesco Guicciardini: The Historian's Craft*, Manchester, 1977, p. 40, n. 3, cf. N. Rubinstein in his introduction to Domandi's translation (Philadelphia, 1965).

13 If you want to see what the thoughts of tyrants are, read Cornelius Tacitus' account of the last conversations of the dying Augustus with Tiberius.<sup>463</sup>

18 Cornelius Tacitus is very good at teaching the subjects of tyrants how to live and survive under tyranny, and at teaching tyrants how to set it up.

21 I have said and written on other occasions that the Medici lost power in 1527 because they governed the state in many respects as

<sup>463</sup> Cf. *Oratio accusatoria*, p. 219. Sasso suggests that G. has compounded Tacitus, *An.1.13.2*, with Suetonius' account of Augustus' death (pp. 35–37).

though it was a free republic, and that I feared the people would lose their free republic because of governing it in many respects as though it was a narrow regime.<sup>464</sup> The reason for these two conclusions is that to maintain itself, the Medici regime, which was hated by the people at large,<sup>465</sup> needed to rely on the support of devoted partisans – men, that is, who on one hand stood to gain a great deal from the regime, and on the other recognised that they would be lost and unable to remain in Florence if the Medici were expelled. But this was impossible, in view of the liberal way in which the Medici distributed the paid and unpaid offices throughout the city, their unwillingness to show scarcely any special favour to their friends' marriage alliances, and their attempt to treat everyone on an equal basis. It would have been very wrong if they had carried these matters to the opposite extreme. Yet even the course they adopted didn't win the Medici regime many supporters. For although people in general<sup>466</sup> liked it, this wasn't enough. Men's hearts were so set on returning to the Great Council, that no acts of kindness, no favours or rewards to the people would have been enough to eradicate their desire. And although the friends of the Medici liked the regime, they weren't so gratified by it that they were prepared to run risks for it. Faced with a crisis, they hoped that if they behaved decently, they could save themselves, as they did in '94, and so were disposed to let things take their course rather than withstand the onslaught.

A popular government must behave in totally the opposite way. Not only is it generally beloved in Florence, but unlike a machine that is programmed by one or a few people to achieve a certain objective, it proceeds differently every day due to the number of people and the ignorance of these who participate in the government. So in order to survive, it must retain popular support and prevent as far as possible factionalism breaking out among the citizens; since popular government cannot or doesn't know how to stamp it out, it will open the way to revolution. In short, popular government must proceed with justice and fairness. This gives everyone a sense of security, which in large part is the source of universal satisfaction and the basis for preserving popular government – not with a few

<sup>464</sup> The contrast is between *lo stato a uso di libertà* and *la libertà a uso di stato*, translated by Grayson as 'absolute'.

<sup>465</sup> *lo universale*

<sup>466</sup> *lo universale* again, inconsistently?

partisans, who are incapable of sustaining it, but with an infinite number of friends. To continue to control it as though it was a narrow regime will transform it into another type of government. This does not preserve the free republic but destroys it.

28 I don't know anyone who dislikes the ambition, the avarice and the sensuality of priests more than I do, both because each of these vices is odious in itself, and because each singly and together are scarcely fitting to someone who professes a life dependent on God – and also because they are so mutually incompatible that anyone who combines them must be an extremely odd sort of person. Nevertheless, the position I have enjoyed with several popes has forced me to love their greatness for my own self-interest. If it weren't for this consideration, I would have loved Martin Luther as much as I love myself – not to be released from the laws taught by the Christian religion as it is normally interpreted and understood, but to see this band of ruffians reduced within their correct bounds, that is, living without vices or without authority.

29 I've very often said – and it's quite true – that it has been more difficult for the Florentines to acquire their small dominion than for the Venetians to acquire their large one. This is because the Florentines live in a province that used to be full of free republics, which it is extremely difficult to extinguish. So it requires the greatest effort to conquer them and, once conquered, it is no less difficult to keep them. Then they have the Church as a neighbour, which is powerful and never dies; and even if it is sometimes in difficulties, it eventually always springs up again with its rights intact and more vigorous than ever. The cities the Venetians have had to capture have been accustomed to subjection and lack any determination to defend themselves or rebel. And for neighbours they have had secular princes, whose life and memory is not eternal.

31 Those who attribute everything to prudence and virtue, and as far as possible rule out the power of fortune, must at least admit that it's quite important to live or be born at a time when your own special virtues or qualities are valued. Take the example of Fabius Maximus, whose great reputation was due to his tendency to procrastinate. This was because he found himself fighting in a war in which impetuosity would have been disastrous and slowness was useful. At another time the reverse could have been true. His good fortune consisted in the fact that his times needed his qualities. Anyone who could change

his nature according to the times would be much less dominated by fortune. But that's extremely difficult, if not impossible.<sup>467</sup>

38 For all its power and its two popes, it is much more difficult for the Medici family to retain political control of Florence than it was for Cosimo, as a private citizen. Apart from the extraordinary powers he enjoyed, he was helped by the times he lived in. He only had to compete with a few powerful men, he wasn't faced with the problem of alienating the whole populace, who hadn't yet known free republican government – indeed, the middling and lower ranks improved their position every time the leading citizens quarrelled and every time a revolution took place. But today, now that they have had a taste of the Great Council, it is no longer a matter of seizing or usurping power from four, six, ten or twenty citizens, but from the whole people. And they have so set their hearts on their free government that there's no hope of getting them to forget it – not with all the *douceurs*, all the good government and public-spiritedness the Medici or other powers may adopt.

46 As an administrator,<sup>468</sup> I've never liked cruelty or excessive penalties – and they are not even necessary. With the exception of a few cases to serve as an example, to maintain people's fear of the law, it's quite enough to punish crimes at a rate of fifteen shillings for every pound<sup>469</sup> – provided one makes it a rule to punish them all.

48 You cannot hold states according to conscience. For if you consider their origin, they are all illegitimate, with the exception only of republics ruling their own cities, and nowhere else. Nor do I exempt the Emperor from this rule – and even less priests, for their violence is double, since they force us with temporal weapons and with spiritual ones.

66 Don't believe those who preach liberty so convincingly. For almost all of them – indeed, perhaps all without exception – have as their objective their own personal interest. Experience demonstrates, and it's quite self-evident, that if they thought they'd be better off in a narrow regime,<sup>470</sup> they would rush there at top speed.

<sup>467</sup> Cf. Machiavelli, *Discourses*, bk. III, ch. 9, *Prince*, ch. 25, etc.

<sup>468</sup> Guicciardini exercised jurisdiction as Governor of Modena and Reggio and President of the Papal States.

<sup>469</sup> ie. reducing penalties by a quarter.

<sup>470</sup> *stato stretto*, tr. Domandi 'absolute government', Grayson 'despotic state'.

producing the disorder he predicted. Certainly it has developed more slowly than perhaps he imagined.

140 To speak of 'the people' is to speak of a mad animal, full of a thousand errors, of a thousand confusions, lacking in taste, in discernment, in stability.<sup>472</sup>

141 Don't be surprised at our ignorance about the past or about what happens in the provinces and far-off countries. For if you think about it, we don't have any proper information about the present, or about the daily happenings in our own city. There is often such a dense fog, or thick wall, between the government Palace and the square outside that the human eye is incapable of penetrating it. People then know as little about what the rulers do, or why, as they do about what goes on in India. So the world is easily filled with erroneous and unfounded opinions.

176 Pray to God that you are always on the winning side, for you will be praised even for things in which you have played no part. In the same way, the loser, on the contrary, will be blamed for an infinite number of things of which he is totally innocent.

212 Of the three types of government – of the one, of the few or of the many – I think that in Florence government of the few would be the worst of all. For it is not natural to the city, and therefore would be as unacceptable there as tyranny. Indeed, they would commit all the evils of a tyranny through their ambition and factionalism, and perhaps more. They would soon divide the city without doing a single one of the good things that a tyrant does.

216 In this world, no one can choose the position into which he is born, nor the situation and the luck with which he is fated to live. So in bestowing praise or blame on men, one must look not at their circumstances but how they cope with them. Men's praise or blame must be based on their behaviour, not the state in which they find themselves. Just as in a comedy or a tragedy, we don't rate the person playing the role of the master and the king higher than the person playing the role of servant. What counts is simply who performs better.

220 I think it's the duty of good citizens, when their country falls into the hands of tyrants, to try to enjoy influence with them, in order

<sup>472</sup> Version B adds that the people's vain opinions are 'as far from the truth as Spain – according to Ptolemy – is from India'; cf. Maxim 141.



to be able to persuade them to do what's good and loathe what's bad. Certainly it's in the interests of the city for the leading citizens to enjoy authority at all times. And although the ignorant and passionate Florentines have always thought differently, they should see how noxious the Medici regime would be, if they were only surrounded by madmen and bad men.

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## Biographical notes

*Albizi, Maso (1343-1417)* A leading Florentine statesman, who was proscribed by the Ciompi regime (1378-81) during his absence in Germany. He returned to lead the oligarchic regime established in 1382. He was frequently appointed an ambassador, helping to organise defence against Milan and later Ladislas of Naples. As Gonfalonier of Justice in 1392, he was responsible for arresting the heads of the popular Alberti family. In 1402 he was created Count Palatine by the Emperor Robert of Bavaria. He is described by Sasso (p. 73) as 'a sort of archetype of pure optimate virtues' in Guicciardini's *History of Florence*.

*Alexander III (356-323 BC)* King of Macedon, called the Great. Son of Philip II of Macedon; for about three or four years he had Aristotle as tutor and in 336 he succeeded his father as king. He crossed the Hellespont in 334 and conquered Syria, Phoenicia and Egypt before striking at Persia itself, which he conquered in 330.

*Alfonso II of Aragon (1448-95), King of Naples* Son of Ferrante, he received a humanist education and distinguished himself as a soldier in the Pazzi War against Florence and then against the Turks at Otranto in 1480-1. His repressive policy against the Neapolitan barons made him unpopular, and after ruling Naples for less than a year, he abdicated on Charles VIII's advance in January 1495, dying in Sicily later that year.

*Aristotle (384–322 BC)* Born in Stagira in Macedon. His father Nicomachus was physician to the family of Amyntas, King of Macedon. Aged seventeen he joined Plato's Academy in Athens, where he stayed until Plato's death in 347. After four years studying natural history in Asia Minor, he was appointed by the King of Macedon, Philip, Amyntas' son, to be tutor to his son Alexander. When Alexander became king, Aristotle returned to Athens to found his own school, the Lyceum. The *Politics*, probably a compilation of his lecture notes, is based on knowledge derived from Aristotle's collection of 158 constitutions. One of the greatest works of political philosophy (edited in this series by S. Everson (Cambridge, 1984)), it was a very popular text in Italy after its translation into Latin in the mid-thirteenth century.

*Augustus, Caesar Octavius (63 BC–AD 14)* The first virtual Emperor of Rome, who assumed the title Augustus after acquiring undivided authority in 27 BC. He was related through his mother to Julius Caesar, who appointed him his heir and adopted son. After enjoying the Triumvirate in 43 BC with M. Lepidus and Antony, his brother-in-law, he defeated Antony at Actium in 31 BC. In AD 4 he adopted as his son Tiberius, who enjoyed extensive powers as tribune and imperial proconsul until Augustus' death, when he was proclaimed Emperor.

*Bentivoglio, Annibale (1413–45)* Lord of Bologna from 1443 to 1445, he was the natural son of Anton Galeazzo, who was head of Bologna on several occasions and a papal *condottiere* with his son. After fleeing to Florence on two occasions, Annibale was helped by Cosimo de' Medici first to be reconciled to Martin V, and later to return as lord of Bologna. He was murdered at his godson's christening in 1445, leaving a three-year-old son (Giovanni II, d. 1508).

*Bentivoglio, Santi (1424–63)* Natural son of Ercole, he was born in Poppi when his father was working for Florence, where he was apprenticed to the wool merchant Nuccio Solosmei. His identity was revealed to Annibale Bentivoglio by Francesco Guidi, Count of Poppi, who went to Bologna after his expulsion from Poppi in 1440. After Annibale's murder (above), his supporters in Bologna invited Santi to succeed him, encouraged by his protector Neri Capponi, as

well as by Cosimo de' Medici. From 1446 until his death in 1463 he was virtual lord of Bologna. See Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 19.

*Bibbiena, Ser Piero da* See Dovizi, Ser Piero da Bibbiena.

*Borromei family* A Tuscan family in origin, retaining marriage and trading links with Florence after exile to Milan. The marriage of Beatrice Borromeo to Giovanni di Antonio Pazzi provided one of the incentives for the Pazzi Conspiracy in 1478, since the Pazzi blamed the Medici for a law passed on 20 March 1477 preventing women inheriting from an intestate, which deprived them of the fortune Beatrice would otherwise have inherited from her father.

*Brienne, Walter of, Duke of Athens* Appointed to command Florence's troops in the war against Lucca, with supreme judicial authority in the city for one year, he was declared lord of the city for life in September 1342. His failure to resolve the economic crisis resulted in his expulsion in July 1343.

*Capponi, Gino di Neri (1350-1421)* Declared a magnate in the Ciompi uprising, he allied with the Albizzi after 1391 and participated in the *Bafia* which exiled the Alberti. Subsequently he played a leading role in the political life of Florence, first as a provincial administrator, and after his office as Gonfalonier of Justice in 1401 as member of the Ten of War and an ambassador. He tried to negotiate the purchase of Pisa from the French in 1406, later becoming a war commissary and, after its conquest, its first Captain, carrying the famous *Pandects* from Pisa to Florence. He was involved in the Council of Pisa and was later ambassador to Pope Alexander V and to Venice before being elected Gonfalonier of Justice again in 1418. With Niccolò Uzzano he opposed the truce with Ladislas negotiated in 1413 by Maso degli Albizzi, who he thought was becoming too powerful. His *Ricordi politici e familiari* are edited by G. Folena (*Miscellanea di studi offerta a Armando Balduino e Biana Bianchi per le loro nozze* Padua, 1962); he wrote notes on the acquisition of Pisa which formed the basis of his son Neri's *Commentary*. He was also an active member of the wool guild and a successful businessman.

*Capponi, Neri di Gino (1388-1457)* He enjoyed a series of citizen offices from 1412 onwards, being elected a prior in 1423. Like his father, he was sent as ambassador to Rome, Venice and elsewhere;

and he also played an important role as a commissary in the war against Lucca, where he came into conflict with Rinaldo degli Albizzi, Maso's son, who turned the government against him in 1432. He was a member of the first Medicean Balìa in 1434, Gonfalonier of Justice in 1436, and almost always a member of the Ten of War from 1437 to 1441. As well as *Commentarii sull'acquisto di Pisa*, he wrote other *Commentarii* and an account of *La cacciata dei conti di Poppi* (ed. Muratori, *RIS* XVII, Milan, 1731). He is buried in S. Spirito in a marble sarcophagus by Bernardo Rossellini with his portrait (1458).

*Capponi Piero di Gino (1446-96)* Grandson of Neri. Unlike his father Gino, who enjoyed brief offices as Gonfalonier of Justice and prior but never played an important political role in the city, devoting himself instead to business, Piero was both a successful businessman (sharing interest in the alum industry with Lorenzo de' Medici) and politically active. He served as an ambassador, a military commissary and a district administrator, as well as being elected a member of the Eight of War and a prior in 1483 and Gonfalonier of Justice in 1493. Piero was closely involved in the events of 1494 and encouraged Piero de' Medici's overthrow, becoming one of the twenty *accoppiatori* appointed in December. Having been an ambassador to France in April 1494, with banking interests in Pisa and Lyons as well as in Florence, he played an important role in the settlement with Charles VIII which was favourable to Florentine merchants in France, where the Capponi bank in Lyons became agent for the large indemnity owed to France. Piero was appointed an ambassador with Savonarola to Charles in Pisa, putting the King up in his villa before he entered Florence on 17 November (his brother Neri later accompanied Charles to and from Naples as Florence's ambassador), so his gesture of tearing up the draft treaty in November 1494 and threatening to respond to French trumpets with bells (Guicciardini, *History of Florence*, p. 105) was perhaps less defiant than it appears. His draft reform proposal in December was 'a quite open defence of a *governo stretto*' in contrast to Domenico Bonsi's more popular scheme (S. Bertelli, 'Constitutional Reforms in Renaissance Florence', *Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, 3 (1973) pp. 150-1, 162-4). Piero was killed fighting to recover Pisa in 1496 at the battle of Soiana. Despite Guicciardini's portrait of him as having 'practically no learning', he enjoyed some humanist education. He was married to an aunt of Guicciardini's, Nicolosa di Messer Luigi.

*Charles VIII of France (1470–98)* After inheriting the throne in 1483, aged thirteen, he decided to assert his newly-acquired claim to the Angevin Kingdom of Naples en route for a crusade to the Holy Land. Encouraged by Lodovico Sforza in Milan, he entered Italy in September 1494. Meeting no resistance from Florence, thanks to Piero de' Medici's unauthorised cession to him of Florentine fortresses, he was crowned King of Naples in May 1495. Defeating an alliance of Italian states at Fornovo, on his way back to France, he re-entered France in October. He was preparing to return to Italy when he died in 1498 at the age of 28.

*Clement VII, Pope: Giulio de' Medici (1478–1534)* Illegitimate son of Giuliano de' Medici (1453–78), Lorenzo il Magnifico's brother, murdered in the cathedral of Florence by the Pazzi conspirators. Exiled from Florence from 1494 to 1512, he was appointed by his cousin Leo X Archbishop of Florence, a cardinal, and in 1517 Papal Vice-Chancellor. After the deaths of Giuliano and Lorenzo de' Medici in 1516 and 1519, Giulio was responsible for governing Florence, where he was popular and easily accessible to the citizens, whom he invited to submit schemes for its government (which included Machiavelli's 1520 *Discourse*). It was at this time that Guicciardini began his *Dialogue*, finishing it after the situation had been changed by the abortive conspiracy to kill Giulio in 1522 and by Giulio's election as Pope Clement VII on 19 November 1523. As Pope, Giulio appointed Guicciardini President of the Romagna in 1524, in 1526 his councillor and in 1530 Papal representative in Florence.

*Dandolo, Andrea (1306–54)* Doge of Venice from 1343 to 1354. As procurator of San Marco from 1328 he revised the legislation in Venice and was an important patron of the arts. During his office as Doge, he wrote the *Chronica per extensum descripta* with chancery help. He corresponded with Petrarch, writing him two letters on 22 May 1351 and 13 June 1354, and was visited by Petrarch as ambassador of the Archbishop of Milan in 1354.

*del Nero, Bernardo (1424–97)* As a second-hand clothes dealer and minor guildsman, Bernardo was one of the men 'devoid of connections and standing' (Guicciardini, *History of Florence*, tr. Domandi, p. 25) who rose to prominence through their association with the Medici

Hannibal, hence his surname, and opposed Scipio's plan to carry the war to Africa. See Machiavelli, *Discourses*, bk. III, ch. 9.

*Ferrante (or Ferdinand) I (1423–94), King of Naples* The illegitimate son of Alfonso of Aragon, who was King of Naples from 1443 to 1458, he was educated by the humanist Lorenzo Valla and became a generous patron of the arts at the court of Naples. He faced strong opposition from the Neapolitan barons, however. Although not popular in Florence, he enjoyed a close relationship with the Medici regime except during the Pazzi War, which was terminated by Lorenzo's personal visit to Ferrante to sue for peace.

*Ficino, Marsilio (1433–99)* The leading platonic philosopher in Florence, who translated all Plato's *Dialogues* into Latin by commission of the Medici (printed in Florence in 1484), as well as other Hermetic and neoplatonic writings. Although his 'academy' in Florence was probably no more than a school or 'gymnasium' (see Hankins, 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy of Florence', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 44 (1991), pp. 429–75), Ficino nevertheless enjoyed considerable influence as teacher and as the foremost authority on Plato at the time. He was chosen to be one of Francesco Guicciardini's godparents as a teacher and friend of Francesco's father Piero, and Guicciardini called him 'the leading platonic philosopher in the world at the time' (*Ricordanze*, p. 53). His friendship with Francesco's father is also attested by the letter he wrote to Piero in 1476 and by his dedication of his *Apologia* to him and two other Florentines in 1489 *Opera omnia*, Basle, 1576, repr. Turin, 1972, vol. I, p. 859.

*Fortebraccio, Niccolò di Stella, d. 1435* A *condottiere* who was employed by Florence against the Visconti in 1426, and helped to recapture Volterra after its rebellion against Florence in 1429. In 1430 he invaded Lucchese territory on his own account, helped by Florentine money, but Florence suffered a defeat against Lucca in December, after failing to heed his advice. In 1431 he became a papal *condottiere*.

*Foscari, Francesco* Doge from 1423 to 1457, when he was deposed by the Ducal Councillors and the Ten. His predecessor predicted that if he were elected, Venice would shortly be at war: during his office campaigns were waged against the Turks, Genoa and Milan, and Brescia and Bergamo were acquired. See Lane, *Venice*, pp. 228–30, 267.

*Gracchus Gaius (154-121 BC)* As Tribune in 123 and 122 BC, he worked to implement the work of the Agrarian commission and re-enacted his elder brother Tiberius' Agrarian Law. His revolutionary plans aroused opposition and he failed to be re-elected for a third term. He was killed in the ensuing riot, which encouraged the party strife of the Marian period and the fall of the republic.

*Gracchus, Tiberius, d.133 BC* Tribune in 133, he was a great reformer and founder of the popular party. His Agrarian Law aimed at recovering vast tracts of public land on which to settle poor citizens as tenants. When vetoed by Octavius, Tiberius created a constitutional crisis in demanding his deposition and later presenting himself for re-election as Tribune, which resulted in his murder.

*Guicciardini, Jacopo di Piero (1422-90)* Francesco's grandfather and, like his elder brother Luigi, a leading member of the Medici regime, twice Gonfalonier of Justice (and elected a third time); three times a member of the Signoria, a scrutineer and a member of the Seventeen Reformers, and frequently an ambassador (in 1468 to Milan, in 1469 to Rome and in 1470 to Naples). Francesco represents his grandfather as 'totally unlettered' but a man of great practical intelligence and moral conscience, unwilling to be implicated in unpopular judicial or fiscal measures, yet 'more highly regarded and more trusted by the regime in matters of substance' than his elder brother Piero, and 'the first man in the city after Lorenzo' (*Memorie di famiglia*, pp. 28-44).

*Guicciardini, Messer Luigi di Piero (1407-87)* Eldest son of Piero di Messer Luigi, he, like his brother Jacopo, was a leading member of the Medici regime and 'enjoyed all the honours it is possible for a citizen to enjoy, because apart from commissaries, legations and external office, and being Gonfalonier of Justice three times, he was also a member of the Signoria three times, of the Ten of War innumerable times, very often a scrutineer, a member of every Balìa in his day'. He was also (according to Guicciardini, who lists all his offices) a close friend of the Dukes of Milan and other Italian rulers. Despite marrying four times, he had no sons, but one of his daughters married Piero di Gino Capponi (*Memorie di famiglia*, pp. 15-28).

*Guicciardini, Piero di Messer Luigi (d.1441)* Second son of Messer Luigi, who was the only son of 'Messer Piero, from whom we are



descended' (factotum in Florence of Messer Niccolò Acciaiuoli, Grand Seneschal of the Kingdom of Naples) and who died c.1400, (*Memorie di famiglia*), pp. 4-7). Although initially 'wayward and disobedient', after the deaths of his father and elder brother, Piero as head of the family later exercised a series of citizen offices and embassies; he was Gonfalonier of Justice three times and often a member of the Ten of War. After Cosimo de' Medici's exile, he was 'first man in the city' after Cosimo and Neri di Gino Capponi (*Memorie di famiglia*, pp. 7-15).

*Guicciardini, Piero di Jacopo (1454-1513)* Francesco's father. In contrast to his own father Jacopo, Piero enjoyed a humanist education, studying 'the humanities, Greek and some philosophy' as a young man. Ficino calls him one of his academicians or pupils, describing him in a letter to him, dated 1 March 1476, as 'distinguished by both your writing and your conduct'; he dedicated his *Apologia* to Piero and two other Florentines in 1489. Although he enjoyed relatively few external offices (two early vicariates, briefly consul in Pisa in 1491 and ambassador to Milan in 1492-3; he refused two other embassies), Piero enjoyed political importance as a member of the Seventeen Reformers in 1490 on his father's death. He frequently participated in consultative meetings, where, 'cautious and deliberate, he frequently expressed the view of common sense' (F. Gilbert, 'Florentine Political Assumptions in the Period of Savonarola and Soderini', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 20 (1957), p. 195). He also wrote a detailed analysis of the 1484 electoral scrutiny (ed. Rubinstein, *Government of Florence*, pp. 318-25; cf. Guicciardini's *Memorie di famiglia*, pp. 48-50); Ficino's *Opera omnia*, Basle, 1576, repr. Turin, 1972, vol. I, pp. 572-4, 754, 859; *The Letters of Marsilio Ficino*, vol. III, London, 1981, p. 9; Hankins, 'The Myth of the Platonic Academy', pp. 443-4, 466-7 (bibliography).

*Ladislav of Durazzo (1380-1414), King of Naples* Only six years of age when he acceded to the throne of Naples in 1386, Ladislav was crowned in 1390. He fought off his rival to the throne, Louis II of Anjou, from 1390 to 1399. In 1404 he seized Rome, Latium and Umbria, and in 1409 Cortona in southern Tuscany. Alarmed by his advance into Tuscany and the fear that he was seeking 'the kingdom of Italy', Florence formed an alliance with Louis II against him. After two years of peace

from 1411 to 1413, war was resumed for a year before peace was signed in June 1414, shortly before his unexpected death.

*Lanfredini Giovanni di Orsino (1437–90)* Member of a wealthy merchant family, he was appointed director of the Medici Bank in Venice in 1471, where he acted as Lorenzo de' Medici's unofficial emissary until his official appointment as Florentine ambassador in Venice in June 1478, after the Pazzi Conspiracy. He was replaced as ambassador in December 1479, returning to Florence, where he remained a partner in the Medici Bank. In 1484 he was appointed Florentine ambassador in Rome, where he was largely responsible for procuring Giovanni de' Medici's cardinalate. He died there in January 1490.

*Leo X, Pope: Giovanni de' Medici (1475–1521)* Second son of Lorenzo il Magnifico, he was admitted into minor orders aged eight and was made 'the youngest Cardinal . . . ever created up to now' in 1492. Exiled from Florence in 1494, he established a rival court in Rome after 1500, where he was elected Pope on 11 March 1513. Although the centre of Medici patronage moved from Florence to Rome after his appointment, he closely supervised the government of Florence as the head of the Medici family after Piero's death in 1503. He appointed Guicciardini Governor of Modena in 1516, of Reggio in 1517 and of Parma in 1519. He presided over the Fifth Lateran Council, which approved the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, possibly reflecting the influence of Ficino's platonism on his early education.

*Livy (59 BC–AD 17)* Roman historian, whose *History of Rome* was composed in 142 books, of which only the first, third and fourth decades survive whole (753–293, 219–179 BC; books 41–5 were discovered in 1531). It was very popular in the fifteenth century, six printed editions being published between 1470 and 1480. Machiavelli's commentary on the first decade, the *Discourses* (written c.1514–21, 1st edition 1531), was in turn commented on by Guicciardini in his *Considerazioni* in about 1530.

*Luther, Martin (1483–1546)* A former Augustinian monk and priest, and a lecturer at the University of Wittenberg. At Wittenberg he evolved the 'new theology' which provided the basis of the Reformation movement, traditionally marked by his nailing of Ninety-Five Theses criticising the Papacy to the church door at Wittenberg in 1517.

*Lycurgus* Traditional founder of the Spartan constitution and military system, first mentioned by the Greek historian Herodotus (d.c.425 BC).

*Marius Gaius (157–87 BC)* Praetor 115 BC, and repeatedly consul from 104 until his death in 86 BC.

*Medici, Cosimo, 'Pater patriae' (1389–1464)* Son of Giovanni di Bicci, a rich banker who largely established his family's fortunes through papal banking. After his return from exile in 1434, Cosimo became head of the political regime which controlled Florence from then until the Medici were expelled in 1494. Using his wealth, political manipulation of the constitution and skilful use of patronage to ensure his control of the republican constitution, he successfully overcame the chronic factionalism of the previous years. After his death in August 1464 he was awarded the Roman republican title of 'Pater patriae'.

*Medici, Giovanni di Lorenzo: see Leo X, Pope.*

*Medici, Giovanni di Pierfrancesco (1467–98)* Brother of Lorenzo; see below.

*Medici, Giuliano (1479–1516), Duke of Nemours* Giuliano, Duke of Nemours, third son of Lorenzo the Magnificent. Although expected to govern Florence after his brother's election as pope, he preferred to live in Rome. In 1515 he married Filiberta of Savoy, Francis I's aunt, the first Medici marriage outside Italy. In November that year, after the French victory at Marignano, he was created Duke of Nemours. He died in March 1516.

*Medici, Lorenzo di Pierfrancesco (1463–1503)* A member of the younger branch of the Medici family which descended from Lorenzo di Bicci, Cosimo's brother. Both his father, Pierfrancesco, and he and his brother Giovanni resented their treatment as minors by the elder branch, and in 1494 he and Giovanni joined the court of Charles VIII of France when he invaded Italy. Lorenzo was a friend and patron of Ficino and Michele Marullo, Botticelli and Michelangelo. He returned to Florence after the expulsion of Piero in 1494 with the name Popolani, adopting a pro-Milanese stance against the Savonarolan party. According to Guicciardini's *History of Florence* (p. 127), in 1497 many citizens, including Bernardo del Nero, wanted

with the help of Milan to establish a regime with power restricted to a few, headed not by Piero but by Lorenzo and Giovanni di Pierfrancesco. The first Duke of Florence, Cosimo de' Medici, was Lorenzo's great-nephew.

*Medici, Lorenzo 'il Magnifico' (1449–92)* Unofficial head of state and cultural leader in Florence from 1469 to 1492. The illness of his father, Piero di Cosimo, meant that Lorenzo was allowed to play a political role in Florence even before his father's death, aged only seventeen, and on Piero's death in 1469, his position as leader of the regime was confirmed. Although he never enjoyed more constitutional powers in Florence than other citizens (the title 'Magnifico' being no more than a common courtesy title), and was less wealthy than Cosimo, he nevertheless increased his political control over the city using the same methods as Cosimo – *Balie*, manipulation of elections and patronage – to achieve a position close to lordship before he died, as Guicciardini admitted, in saying in his *History of Florence* that Lorenzo 'treated the city completely according to his arbitrary will, just as if he had been its lord' (ed. Bari, p. 73, my translation; cf tr. Domandi, p. 70).

*Medici, Piero di Lorenzo (1471–1503)* Eldest son of Lorenzo il Magnifico and his Neapolitan wife, Clarice Orsini. Educated by Angelo Poliziano as a classical scholar, Piero was disliked by the citizens after his father's death for his haughty behaviour (which Guicciardini attributes partly to his 'foreign blood') and for his policies, especially after the French invasion. Although he clearly lacked Lorenzo's charm, many of his ministers and favourites had been inherited from Lorenzo and it seems likely that they, as much as Piero, were responsible for the overthrow of the Medici regime on 9 November 1494. Piero had handed over four fortresses and the ports of Pisa and Livorno to Charles VIII with no government mandate. A plot to restore him in April 1497 failed (see under Bernardo del Nero). After making several other attempts to return by stirring up trouble in Arezzo and the Casentino, and negotiating with Florence's enemies, Piero was finally drowned in the river Garigliano in 1503 when fleeing after the French defeat (see *History of Florence*, pp. 293–5).

*Orsini family* Leading Roman baronial family with a castle at Bracciano, which included several popes as well as numerous other church-

men, statesmen and soldiers. When Lorenzo de' Medici married Clarice Orsini (d.1488) in 1469, he was the first member of his family to marry out of Florence. He was largely influential in procuring the appointment of her brother Rinaldo as archbishop of Florence in 1474, later marrying his son Piero to Alfonsina Orsini. Thanks to this marriage relationship, the Orsini were also favoured by the Medici as *condottieri*, Paolo Orsini serving Florence before and after 1494 until his death by strangulation in 1502.

*Pazzi family* An ancient noble Florentine family, which by tradition brought back fire from the Holy Sepulchre after the first Crusade. In the fifteenth century, they were leading bankers in Florence and Rome, and Medici rivals. After Francesco Pazzi (b.1444, head of the Rome branch) contravened an agreement not to lend Sixtus IV money to acquire Imola in 1473 (see Riario, Girolamo), his brother Giovanni was deprived of the intestate inheritance of his wife, Beatrice Borromeo. With papal connivance, Francesco and his uncle, Jacopo (b.1422, head of the family), together with Francesco and Jacopo Salviati, then organised a conspiracy to murder the Medici brothers in the Florentine cathedral on Easter Day 1478. All the Pazzi, including Guglielmo (b. 1437, Francesco's brother and Lorenzo de' Medici's brother-in-law) were punished, by either death, imprisonment or exile.

*Pazzi, Renato di Piero (1442-78)* A member of the Eight of Ward in 1474 and official of the Mint in 1476, he was devoted to scholarship and not directly involved in politics or the conspiracy. His death by hanging was generally condemned as unjust. See Guicciardini, *History of Florence*, pp. 30, 35: 'he suffered for being held wise and for enjoying popular support and goodwill'.

*Pericles (c.495-429 BC)* An Athenian statesman who became a popular leader and played a leading role in domestic and foreign policy, especially during the Peloponnesian War, until plague ravaged Athens. He lost his office and was fined for embezzlement; he died of plague soon after his reappointment as *strategus*.

*Pompey, Gnaeus (106-48 BC)* Called Magnus after 81 BC, who won a series of victories and triumphs after 83 BC until his murder in 48 BC.

*Puccio di Antonio Pucci (1389-1449)* A Medicean factorum of humble origins to whom many politically shrewd sayings are attrib-

uted; see Angelo Poliziano, *Detti piacevoli* (ed. T. Zanato, Rome, 1983). Active in politics as a Medicean before 1433, he was exiled with the Medici and returned to enjoy a privileged position in Cosimo's regime, rising from artisan status to enter the bankers' guild and enjoying political influence as scrutineer of the Mercanzia. His son Antonio inherited his position in the regime and was patron of the oratory of S. Sebastian, with Pollaiuolo's painting of the saint, in SS. Annunziata.

*Riario, Girolamo, Count (1443-88)* Nephew of Sixtus IV, who acquired Imola from the Duke of Milan and married his illegitimate daughter Caterina to Girolamo in 1473. Girolamo played an important part in the Pazzi Conspiracy and subsequently provided a centre of opposition to Lorenzo in Rome. His assassination in Forlì in 1488 was probably encouraged by Lorenzo.

*Rucellai, Cosimo di Bernardo* After the death of his father in 1514, he was host to literary gatherings in the gardens off the via della Scala in Florence, which had been laid out by his grandfather Giovanni, patron and writer (his *Zibaldone* is edited by A. Perosa, Warburg Institute, London, 1960 and (vol. II), 1981). Machiavelli participated in these gatherings and dedicated his *Discourses* to Cosimo, who is one of the protagonists in his *Art of War*, which is set there.

*Savonarola, Girolamo (1452-98)* A Dominican preacher from Ferrara who was first sent to Florence in 1482 where he stayed until 1487: he returned in 1490 and stayed until his death in 1498. After preaching a series of sermons prophesying the death of Lorenzo de' Medici and other rulers, the descent of Charles VIII to Italy, and the scourge of the Church, he acquired great political as well as religious influence in the city. He was sent as ambassador to parley with Charles VIII in Pisa in November 1494, as well as on other occasions, and after Piero de' Medici's expulsion on 9 November he assumed a leading role in introducing the enlarged Great Council, as well as a series of laws to stabilise the new regime and reform its morals. Faced with opposition in Florence and Alexander VI's hostility, due to his criticisms and his prophecies, he was excommunicated and prevented from preaching. Although he retained a devoted band of followers, he lost widespread support after his excommunication, and following a judicial process he was hanged and burnt in the Piazza

della Signoria in May 1498. Many of his sermons, as well as a political treatise and some spiritual works, were printed during his lifetime and helped to perpetuate his influence after his death. See E. Gusberti, 'Il Savonarola del Guicciardini', *Nuova rivista storica*, 54 (1970), pp. 581-601, 55 (1971), pp. 21-89.

*Scali, Giorgio (c.1350-82)* Member of a noble Florentine family, who became alienated from the Guelf oligarchy in the 1370s and emerged as a popular leader in the Ciompi uprising in 1378. He was held to have abused his power during the guild regime which followed, and was executed in the reaction against it in January 1382.

*The Scipios* An illustrious Roman family, which included Publius Cornelius Scipio Africanus (c.236-183BC), who successfully drove the Carthaginians from Spain in 210-207 and later won a great victory against Hannibal's army in October 202, returning to Rome in triumph to be awarded the surname Africanus; and Publius Cornelius Scipio Aemilianus Africanus (185/4-129 BC), adopted by the eldest son of the above, also a brilliant soldier, a senator and centre of the literary Scipionic Circle in Rome; his youthful development is described by Polybius.

*Servius Tullius (578-535 BC?)* The sixth King of Rome, who according to tradition was responsible for the treaty between Rome and the Latin League, preserved in the temple he built on the Aventine. However, the constitution attributed to him as a 'reputedly liberal ruler' is probably a fictitious precedent for the laws passed in the fourth century on behalf of the plebs.

*Sforza, Francesco (1401-66), Duke of Milan* Son of Muzio Attendolo Sforza, he became leader of his father's troops on his death in 1424. He was employed as *condottiere* by Duke Filippo Visconti of Milan and in 1441 married his illegitimate daughter Bianca Maria, through whom he later claimed to be heir to the duchy. He briefly served the Ambrosian republic established in Milan on Filippo Maria's death in 1447, but after changing sides and attacking Milan with Venetian help, he was accepted as head of the city and duchy. His close friendship with Cosimo de' Medici established a new alignment of power in Italy, with Florence now allied with Milan instead of Venice.

*Sforza, Lodovico, 'il Moro' (1451-1508), Duke of Milan* Second son of Francesco, he was known as 'the Moor' probably because of his

dark complexion. After the assassination of his brother Galeazzo Maria in 1476, he acted as effective ruler of Milan in lieu of his nephew, Gian Galeazzo, related by marriage to Alfonso of Naples, becoming Duke only in 1494 on Gian Galeazzo's death. He married Beatrice d'Este (1475-97), daughter of Ercole I, Duke of Ferrara, in 1491 and patronised a cultivated court in Milan, where Leonardo da Vinci worked from 1482-99. However, by encouraging Charles VIII's invasion in 1494, to defend his position against his nephew and the Aragonese, he not only destabilised Italy but brought about his own downfall when Louis XII, as claimant to Milan as well as Naples, invaded Italy in 1499, hence Guicciardini's comment that he was 'less intelligent than he is held to be'.

*Sixtus IV, Pope: Francesco della Rovere (1414-84)* Born near Savona in Liguria, he became a Franciscan friar and General of the Order in 1464, cardinal in 1467 and Pope in August 1471. He was noted as a theologian and administrator, but through his nepotism became heavily involved in Italian politics. He was drawn into the Pazzi Conspiracy through supporting his nephew Girolamo Riario as ruler of Imola, and later participated with Venice in a war against Ferrara. He was a prominent patron of humanists and artists, and it was partly to repair the damage of the Pazzi War that several Florentine artists were sent to Rome to help to paint the Sistine Chapel, named after him, with its message of papal primacy.

*Soderini, Pagolantonio di Messer Tommaso (1448-99)* Eldest son of Tommaso (see below), he was twice a prior during the Medici regime, a member of the 1480 Balìa and the second commission of Seventeen Reformers in 1490. Despite supporting the 1494 revolution, he was not appointed one of the twenty scrutineers, as a result of which he became an ardent Savonarolan and attempted to thwart the attempt of the Twenty to establish a restrictive oligarchy in Florence. The diary of his youngest brother, Gianvettorio, supports Guicciardini's assertion that it was Pagolantonio who persuaded Savonarola 'to establish a popular government' and force the Twenty to renounce their office; it also states that because he wanted 'to keep a foot in both camps', he was not liked by Savonarola either (*History of Florence*, p. 137, and S. Bertelli, 'Di due profili mancati', *Archivio storico italiano*, 145 (1987), p. 583). He was nevertheless a key figure in the Savonarolan party, one of its two leaders after Francesco Valori, a



frequent speaker in *pratiche*, 'definite and outspoken in his views, an enemy of shillyshallying and . . . a moulder of opinion' (Gilbert, 'Florentine Political Assumptions', p. 195), a member of the Ten of War in 1495 and 1497, and Gonfalonier of Justice in the same year, when he was threatened by popular wrath after Francesco Valori's murder. Then, and after Savonarola's death the following year, he was saved by the support of his family and other leading citizens, and after lying low for a short time returned to public life as an ambassador and commissary. He died in Pisa in 1499, unmourned, according to Guicciardini (*ibid.*, p. 169), for despite his good qualities and his republicanism, 'he was considered ambitious and wanted a revolution in order to restrict power to the hands of a few citizens'.

*Soderini, Piero di Messer Tommaso (1452-1522)* Life Gonfalonier of Justice, 1502. Like his elder brother Pagolantonio, he enjoyed office under the Medicean regime and after Lorenzo's death was sent as ambassador to the court of Charles VIII. After his brother Pagolantonio's death in 1499, he was in effect head of the family (the second eldest brother, Francesco, had an ecclesiastical career as Bishop of Volterra, cardinal in 1503), and he played an active role as one of four leading citizens in the government: a member of the Signoria in 1499, then of the Dieci, Gonfalonier of Justice for two months in 1501, and frequently an ambassador. He was aged 50 when elected as the first Life Gonfalonier the following year, perhaps partly because he was childless by his marriage to the daughter of the Marquis Gabriele of Fosdinovo in 1476. As Gonfalonier, he frequently summoned wide consultative meetings and was successful in overcoming many of the financial problems of the republic. However, he was ultimately unsuccessful in preventing the Medici's return to power, for which he was criticised by Machiavelli for being insufficiently ruthless (*Discourses*, bk. III, ch. 3). Exiled in 1512, he spent most of the rest of his life in Rome.

*Soderini, Messer Tommaso di Lorenzo (1402-1485)* A leading member of the Medici regime and one of the richest citizens in Florence by the time of his death, father of the first life Gonfalonier. Although his father, married to a daughter of Palla Strozzi, was executed for fraud in 1405, and his brother Niccolò (1403-74) later conspired against Piero de Medici in 1465-6, Tommaso remained loyal to Piero and later to the young Lorenzo, and enjoyed a series of responsible

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## Glossary

**accoppiatori:** scrutineers. Electoral officials who acquired increased powers during the Medici regime, often pre-selecting members for the Signoria, as well as distributing the name-tickets of citizens for offices after qualification by the scrutiny council. See **electoral procedures** below Rubinstein. *Government of Florence*, chapter 2.

**alterazione:** see **mutazione**.

**amorevole:** used especially during the Savonarolan period by supporters of the regime, to describe kind and 'loving' behaviour for the common good. Since it presumably had these overtones for Guicciardini, I have translated it as 'loving' (or 'lovingly', **amorevolmente**), in preference to 'kind' or 'benevolent', to retain its special meaning at this time.

**arbitrio:** either arbitration or an arbitrary decision, based on the ruler's will. It is thus an ambivalent word whose double meaning conveys different but ill-distinguished aspects of Lorenzo de' Medici's power.

**assoluto:** absolute, see **stato**.

**balia:** literally 'full powers', which could be granted to military or judicial offices, like the Ten of War or the Eight of Ward. It is also the word used for a council appointed by a **parlamento** with full powers, to replace the normal legislative councils for a limited period. See Rubinstein, *Government of Florence*, ch. 4.

**bottega:** literally a shop or workshop, it is frequently used to mean 'to treat as a profit-making concern, like a shop', as in the expression,

'they have made a **bottega** of the state (*stato*)' or 'a **bottega** of the church' (Domenico Cecchi, *Riforma sancta*, Florence, 1497; Savonarola, *Prediche sopra Giobbe*, Rome, 1957, vol. II, p. 446). The use of **maestro di bottega** for 'boss' or 'head of the shop' is discussed under **padrone**.

**capo**; see **padrone**.

**cerchio**: the inner circle of major office-holders, who were voted on first in a scrutiny of office.

**cittadini**: see **civiltà**.

**civiltà**: civilised or civil behaviour, that befits the members of city states, as in A, where 'citizens' (**cittadini**) replaces **civiltà**.

**comunità**: literally 'community', but A uses it to replace 'public' to describe 'possessions that had belonged to the public' or 'the community'.

**commune**: common, shared or 'open to all'; or as a noun, 'commune'.

**contado**: see **dominio**.

**dominio**: although it can have the more generalised meaning of 'rule', I have always translated it as 'dominion', to mean, as Guicciardini and other Florentines used it, Florence's territorial state or 'empire' (a word also used in the fifteenth century), which consisted of the city, the **contado** (the countryside or county surrounding Florence and under its strict control), and the **distretto**, or district (consisting of previously independent cities beyond the *contado*, which were subject to Florentine sovereignty and justice but enjoyed limited self-government). Sometimes it is used interchangeably with **stato**.

**electoral procedures**: until 1494 citizens were made eligible for office by a scrutiny council held every five years; those approved by a two-thirds' majority were imborsed (their name-tickets were put into bags) by scrutineers or *accoppiatori*. When the bags were 'closed', names were drawn for office by lot at the appropriate times; when they were 'open', the scrutineers pre-selected the names, which were drawn 'by hand' instead of by lot; the latter system was favoured by the Medici. In December 1494 the Great Council became responsible for voting citizens to office, the scrutiny system being definitively abandoned a year later. Between 1494 and 1500 the system became constantly more 'larga' or broadly-based, marked by three stages. A distinction was initially made between three groups of offices and three pathways to office: a) the major, non-paid, offices, together

with some other offices, like castellans (added in the course of 1495), were nominated by drawn electioneers and elected in the Great Council by a simple (or absolute, a half + one) majority and by more votes than the others (a relative majority) (pathway 1: nomination and election); (b) the paid administrative offices were at first elected as above and after 26 November 1495 were drawn by lot and then elected by a simple and a relative majority in the Great Council (pathway 2: sortition and election); (c) the lower-paid internal administrative offices which were simply drawn by lot from the bags of the Great Council (pathway 3: sortition). In May 1497 two further stages were added to pathway 1: the more important external administrative offices were, after nomination and election, imborsed and drawn for office when needed (pathway 4: nomination, election and sortition); the remainder were divided into 2 groups, half elected, half drawn by lot, imborsed together, drawn, elected and reimborsed (pathway 5: doppia tratta or double sortition). In May 1499 the major offices were elected by pathway 4.

**fortuna:** this word is used by Guicciardini, like Machiavelli, to convey a variety of meanings, including unpredictable good and bad luck or chance; the intervention of a force or agent, the goddess Fortune who could be implacable or swayed by gifts to smile upon one; a deterministic cycle of events; and one's personal condition or circumstances (see the detailed analysis in *Notes to The Prince* in this series, pp. 104–6, and Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, pp. 63–85). Guicciardini shared the Florentines' belief that their city enjoyed its own good fortune (p. 90), like Goro Dati in the early fifteenth century, who attributed Florence's prosperity partly to fortune, in whose hands 'the goods of the world are placed' (*L'Istoria di Firenze*, ed. L. Pratesi, Norcia, 1904, p. 60). At the same time, however, Guicciardini believed in the determinism of fortune's wheel, according to which the city's fortune could be 'fresh' or 'worn out' according to whether it had run its full course or not.

**generoso:** means generous or noble, the two words being interchangeable in A, B and C.

**Gonfalonier of Justice:** the head of the government in Florence. He and the eight priors, who together formed the Signoria, had to live in the Palace of the Signoria during their two-month period of office. In 1502 the Gonfalonier was appointed for life, Piero Soderini being elected the first life Gonfalonier.

**governo naturale or violento:** Guicciardini uses two groups of closely associated words to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate government, that is, **governo naturale, volontario, ordinario, libero**, which is legitimate, free and republican government; and **governo violento, usurpato**, which is imposed by force or necessity and is illegitimate or tyrannical government. Since for us natural behaviour often implies compulsion and natural rule illegitimacy, I have generally used legitimate for natural, and illegitimate for usurped or violent, government to make Guicciardini's meaning clear. Since **governo** and **stato** are often interchangeable (see **stato** below), I translate it as regime as well as government.

**governi publici:** I have translated this in the opening sentence as 'government and public administration', instead of simply 'government', in order to combine the concept of 'public', which is very important to Guicciardini's argument, with the double meaning of **governo** as administration as well as government.

**grado:** a word which combines a variety of meanings, including rank, status, step and degree, all of which have been used to convey its meaning in different contexts.

**grandezza:** literally 'greatness', but whereas in English the word is usually a term of praise, as in **grandezza d'animo**, high-mindedness or greatness of spirit, it can be used by Guicciardini to convey simply great size, as in **grandezze delle città**, or to mean power or dominance in a neutral or pejorative sense, as in when referring to Cosimo's power or **grandezza** on pp. 81, 108, or in **grandezze moderne**, 'big men in modern cities' (p. 94).

**humours:** see **umori**.

**larghezza, larga:** latitude, broadly-based; **larghezza infinita:** 'unlimited participation', cf. **stato**.

**libertà, libero:** as for Machiavelli (see notes to *The Prince* in this series, pp. 109–10), liberty has several meanings, primarily self-government or political independence from an external power, and a free or republican constitution, which can be combined, as in 'città libere [A: repubbliche] of Greece'. Guicciardini's reference to 'liberties' (*le libertà*) might suggest individual rights, but he makes it plain (pp. 35–6) that he is talking of political liberty, or 'the liberty we think about in governing a city, not the liberty that concerns individuals, that is, whether a man is free or enslaved'. However, he does also use liberty to mean free, as opposed to servile or subject status

(pp. 35–6), and also to mean the negative freedom of living under the law, or what he calls ‘a well ordered’ freedom (p. 37). It is part of his argument that in demanding liberty, people confuse these different definitions, and in discussing them, he provides one of the earliest and clearest critiques of the use of this word. The contrasting pair of terms, **stato** (or **governo, vivere**) **libero** and **stato stretto**, is discussed under **stato**.

**militia**: either ‘army’, when referring to Rome, or ‘militia’, to distinguish citizen forces from mercenaries.

**moltitudine**: usually translated as ‘populace’ or ‘the masses’ (*l’universale*), as opposed to **popolo**, ‘the people’, although in one instance A has **popolo** for **moltitudine**.

**mutazione, alterazione**: since Guicciardini draws a clear distinction between these words, I have translated **mutazione** as ‘revolution’ and **alterazione** as ‘change of regime’, unless something less serious is implied, as in ‘daily uprisings and plebiscites’ (*ogni dì . . . mutazione e parlamenti*). Despite the danger of anachronism in using ‘revolution’ before the French Revolution, the word **revoluzione** was already in use to describe political upheavals and overturnings (e.g. *Vespasiano da Bisticci, Le Vite*, ed. A. Greco, II, Florence, 1976, p. 156; Machiavelli, *The Prince*, ch. 26; cf. Dunn, ‘Revolution’, in *Political Innovation*, esp. pp. 335–7). Although it was not the word most frequently used by contemporaries to describe the events of 1494, it nevertheless best conveys the sense of radical change implied by **mutazione** (with the meaning Guicciardini gives it of ‘mutation from one species to another’, as well as in its contemporary usage, see Bartolomeo Cerretani: ‘la grande mutation dello stato della nostra città in 1494’, *Historia fiorentina*, BNF, MS II.III.74, fo. 162r; Francesco Gaddi: ‘la mutatione dello stato de Medici’, *Priorista*, ASF Tratte 62, fo. 231r; the law abolishing the Cento in December 1494: ‘ex nova mutatione status reipublicae per parlamentum’, ASF Cento 3, fo. 41r). See also **novità**.

**natura**: nature is often synonymous with reason and legitimacy, so that ‘speaking naturally’ means speaking through the light of natural reason, as opposed to quoting the books of philosophers; a *principe naturale* means a legitimate prince.

**novità**: usually means ‘uprisings’, but although it can mean change of regime, as in the ‘novità of ’34’, it is to be contrasted with **mutazione**.

**nobile**: noble or generous, the two words being interchangeable in A, B and C; see **ottimati**.

**onestas et utilis:** the common use of this Ciceronian dichotomy between profit and honour in political discussions is illustrated by Matteo Palmieri's contribution to a consultative meeting in January 1460: that he understood the debate turned on 'whether profit or honour should be deferred to' and that it often happened in a crisis that the former rather than the latter was followed (ASF *Cons. Prat.* 56, fo.23v; cf. Rubinstein, 'Cosimo, optimus civis', in *Cosimo 'Il Vecchio' de' Medici 1389-1464*, ed. F. Ames-Lewis, Oxford, 1992, pp. 5-20. As **onori e utili**, the same pair of words is used in Florence to distinguish the unpaid political offices 'of honour' in Florence (awarded only to citizens) and the salaried public offices in the dominion (vicariates, podestariates and captaincies), as well as the more modest bureaucratic offices in the city. Translated as 'unpaid offices of honour and salaried offices' or 'paid and unpaid offices', it always has this meaning.

**ottimati:** the Florentine ruling elite or oligarchy, literally 'the best', as Guicciardini defines it on p. 95. Since it consisted of a mixture of old noble and popular families as well as newer rich merchant families, it was not an aristocracy of birth (see Butters, *Governors and Government*, pp. 2-4); but at its best it represented for Guicciardini the qualities of nobility and generosity normally associated with hereditary aristocracy. I have on occasion translated it as 'optimate regime' when Guicciardini is not specifically referring to the Florentine **ottimati** (p. 134), 'the leading citizens', or 'the government of the few, or as you others call it, the government of the **ottimati**' (p. 21).

**padrone, capo, principale:** usually translated as 'boss', since all these words are used by Guicciardini to describe the head of a faction or tyranny who exercises power unconstitutionally through the type of patronage and force associated with a Mafia boss today. The role of such a person is well defined by F. W. Kent in his introduction to *Patronage, Art and Society in Renaissance Italy*, Oxford, 1987, pp. 4-5: 'Contemporaries called leading patrons the "gran maestri" (*maggiori* or *principali* in a more formal political context), a phrase close to the social anthropologist's "Big Men" . . . while the expression "maestro della bottega" (master of the establishment) was used of a regime's leader'.

**Palace:** the Government 'Palace of the Signoria'.

**parlamento:** a plebiscite, or meeting of all the people in the Piazza della Signoria, to approve by acclamation a change of law or regime.

It was intended to represent the ultimate sovereignty of the people, but since the vote was far from universal or free, in view of the routine presence of armed troops in the square, it was denounced as an instrument of tyranny not only by Guicciardini but by Savonarola, who encouraged its abolition on 13 August 1495 (the first law to be printed in Florence; see his *Prediche sopra i Salmi*, vol. II, ed. V. Romano, Rome, 1969, pp. 173-4, and Guicciardini, *Del modo di ordinare il governo popolare*, pp. 248-9); but it was restored with the return of the Medici in 1512.

**pasto, dare**: literally to feed, but since it is used by Guicciardini to describe the giving of jobs in the form of offices or other rewards, I have translated it as 'regale' or 'gratify'.

**patria**: one's own city, native city, country, birthplace or homeland, all used in preference to 'fatherland'. I have in one instance (p. 158) translated it as 'city walls'.

**plebe**: plebs when referring to Rome, plebeians if unspecific, otherwise in Florence the working classes.

**podestà**: force or power. It is also the word used to describe the principal law officer in Florence, who was recruited from outside the territory, normally for a period of six months. He was a noble, who was accompanied by several judges and an armed troop; he lived in the palace of the Captain of the People, later called the Bargello, while in Florence.

**popolo**: literally 'the people' and I usually translate it as such, but it normally means 'the citizen body', to be distinguished from the **moltitudine** and the **universale** who lacked political rights, translated here either as 'the populace', 'the masses' or 'the people at large'.

**pratica**: an informal meeting of citizens summoned by the Gonfalonier of Justice for advice often at the beginning of his two-month office. It provided a useful means for the government to test opinion and for citizens outside the government to express their opinions. See F. Gilbert, 'Florentine Political Assumptions' and *Consulte e Pratiche 1505-12* (ed. D. Fachard, Geneva, 1988).

**principe**: although the word can mean 'leading citizen', especially when used of citizens in Florence in the fifteenth century (see Rubinstein, 'Cosimo optimus civis'), Guicciardini uses it to mean either a ruler (as **principi naturali**, 'legitimate rulers'), or more specifically a prince, or princely ruler in contrast to a republican ruler (as on



p. 99, the Great Council must hold the place and authority 'of the prince' in the city; and Appendix, Maxim 107; cf. notes on *The Prince* in this series, pp. 100-1).

**prudenzia**: literally 'prudence', but since this enjoys a moral and slightly 'prudish' connotation in its present usage, I sometimes translate it as practical wisdom (e.g. pp. 6, 148). There is a full discussion of this classical virtue in Pocock (*The Machiavellian Moment*, pp. 130, 232, 237-8) who describes it as an ability to predict the outcome of things, a virtue associated with experience that only an elite has time to acquire; the skills of a steersman or doctor to observe events and accommodate himself to them rather than seeking to shape or determine them, the politics of manoeuvre rather than action. He compares this with Aquinas' definition of prudence as 'right reason about things to be done', according to whom Cicero added 'memory of past, understanding of present and foresight of future' (pp. 24-5, quoting from the *Summa Theologica*, 1a-2ae, question 57, 4. New York and London, 1969, vol. 23, p. 51).

**reggimento**: regime or government. See the discussion in Dale Kent, 'The Florentine *Reggimento* in the Fifteenth Century', *Renaissance Quarterly*, 28 (1975), pp. 575-638.

**rispetto**: to hold in respect, have consideration for, fear, as in the expression **per rispetto umano**, 'for fear of what people will say', or as in **persone di rispetto**: 'people they treat with consideration, because it is very difficult to deal with those you love or whom you fear will one day return in kind either to you or to your family'; see the discussion in the edition of *The Prince* in this series, p. xxxiii.

**savio**: usually 'wise' but also intelligent, as in *ha del savio* 'has any intelligence' (p. 160).

**scandoli**, **scandoloso**: these words enjoy a specifically political meaning in Florence in referring to overweening and disorderly behaviour, especially by the magnates, as in the law *Contra Scandalosos* passed on 19 December 1429, 'to restrain the pride of the great which requires to be subdued and checked, so that no one either relying upon his own judgement or additions or by trusting in mindship, neighbourhood, patronage or partisanship, should dare to cause any disturbance to the peace and tranquillity of the city' (see Dale Kent, *The Rise of the Medici*, Oxford, 1978, p. 248).

**sette**: secret cabals or cliques.

**scrutiny**: see electoral procedures.

**Signoria:** see Gonfalonier of Justice.

**Six beans:** the majority (two-thirds) vote of the Signoria or the Eight of Ward, which voted in favour of a motion by casting a black bean into a bag. Since the Signoria enjoyed many sovereign powers and the Otto with *balia* enjoyed summary powers of justice, 'Six beans' became synonymous with the arbitrary power of the government.

**stato:** this word has various meanings in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, including status, estate, regime and state (see Rubinstein, 'Notes on the Word *stato* in Florence before Machiavelli', in *Florilegium Historiale: Essays Presented to Wallace K. Ferguson*, ed. J. G. Rowe and W. H. Stockdale, Toronto, 1971; Skinner, 'The State', in *Political Innovation*, pp. 90–131; see notes, *The Prince* in this series, pp. 102–3). Guicciardini most frequently uses it to mean 'regime' or 'government', and in A, B and C *stato* and *governo* are often interchangeable; cf. *parlare del governo/ stato, governo/ stato libero, governo/ stato ottimo, governo/ stato stretto* (*Dialogo*, ed. Palmarocchi, pp. 305, 306, 316, 321, 201, etc.) But in other contexts it clearly also means 'territorial state' or 'city state' (pp. 80, 71), or the territory and its government. Where it is repeated to describe contrasting types of regime, I have also repeated the same word, e.g. 'state' on p. 71 and 'regime' on pp. 74–5. It can also mean 'power', as in *ebbe lo stato piu assoluto*: 'enjoyed more absolute power' (p. 32, cf. 167).

**stato stretto/ stato largo or libero:** this important dichotomy is crucial to Guicciardini's argument about power in Florence (see Introduction, p. xxvi). I have therefore respected his consistent use of these contrasting terms by translating them as narrow regime/ government and broadly-based regime/ government and free or open regime/government, or republic. Since Guicciardini uses *stato stretto* to describe a regime controlled by an aristocracy, oligarchy or 'a few' (as in *uno governo stretto* with one or a few is better than one with many, p. 60), as well as the Medici regime in Lorenzo's day, which he also described as one-man government, the word cannot easily be translated as oligarchy or as despotism or tyranny, as some writers have been tempted to do; *stato libero* can also refer to a republic in general, or more specifically to the guild regime of the 1290s or the Savonarolan regime of the 1490s. The same terms are also used to discuss whether consultative councils should be restricted or open: cf. F. Gilbert, *Machiavelli and Guicciardini: Politics*

and *History in Sixteenth-Century Florence*, Princeton, 1965, p. 60, Q. Skinner, *The Foundations of Modern Political Thought*, Cambridge, 1978, vol. 1, pp. 159–61.

**stato di uomini da bene**: see **uomini da bene**.

**stato stretto, ristretto** see **stato**.

**stravaganza**: fantasy or excess.

**suddito**: a subject as opposed to a citizen, that is, a member of Florence's dominion and excluded from political rights in Florence. Unless enjoying special privileges, subjects were not allowed to invest in Florence's state Funded Debt or Dowry Fund, and in addition they had to pay a tax, the *Estimo*, which was not levied on citizens. See Appendix, Maxim 107.

**tamburazione**: the process whereby citizens could post anonymous denunciations of crimes, used initially in the fourteenth century against the magnates and in the fifteenth especially by the Night Officials and the Conservators of the Laws. See Zorzi, *L'amministrazione*, pp. 81–2.

**umori**: literally humours, which I have normally retained to remind us that Guicciardini, like Machiavelli, shared a deterministic pre-modern view of the world. According to this view (described by Parel, *The Machiavellian Cosmos*, esp. pp. 101–12), it is the influence of the unchanging planets at the time of birth that determines the temperament of people, as well as cities. The four types of temperament, choleric, sanguine, phlegmatic and melancholic, result from the balance of their four corresponding humours, which in turn are related to the four elements, hence the close relationship between man as a microcosm and the wider world. Good health and harmony are achieved by the correspondence between the times and one's temperament. So when Guicciardini refers to 'the humours of the city and its citizens' (p. 97), he does not mean its transient mood of the day but its fundamental character or make-up, which must be balanced and in harmony with the times to be healthy. When 'humours' seems inappropriate, I have translated it as 'temperament', feelings or 'spirits', as in *sfogare gli umori*, 'let off their spirits', but we should always remember its underlying meaning.

**universale**: see **popolo**.

**uomini da bene**: literally men of worth, meaning men of wealth and standing, since *bene* means both material possessions and moral worth, as well as wisdom (*uomini da bene*, cioè i più savi e

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